

CHARLES WAGNER.

THE VOICE OF NATURE,

OR,

203

THE SOUL OF THINGS.

BY

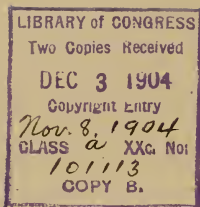
REV. CHARLES WAGNER,

Author of "The Simple Life," "The Busy Life." Etc., Etc.

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THREE BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THE SIMPLE LIFE.

THE VOICE OF NATURE.

THE BUSY LIFE.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
Author's Preface.....	5
The Key to the Fields.....	7
The Lessons of the Mountain.....	10
The Torrent.....	12
Too Much Protection.....	15
The Old Stock.....	18
Vain Hopes—Chimerical Terrors.....	20
On the Frontier.....	24
The Old Sawyer.....	28
On the Banks of the Lemán.....	31
About Old Rags.....	33
The Two Cuirassiers.....	35
Shelter	38
How We Make Enemies.....	41
Without a Watch.....	43
Without a Purse.....	47
A Fishing Party.....	52
Wheat	55
A Pest.....	59
Flies	65
Small People—Great Examples.....	71
What Are They Looking At?.....	73
On the Death of the Flowers.....	76
An Act of Justice.....	78
A Cat in the Water.....	81
Those to Whom We Listen.....	84
Moving	87

	PAGE
To Better Oneself.....	89
What Is Going to Happen?.....	93
The Terrace Builder's Breakfast.....	96
Habit	99
Questions of Age.....	102
To Serve at the Right Moment.....	105
Monsieur Son-in-Law.....	108
Well Informed.....	113
Impossible Sympathy.....	116
To Distrust Oneself.....	119
Find the Formula.....	123
Infamous Capital.....	126
Ready Money.....	130
A New Divinity.....	134
Street Sweepers.....	138
Extra Horses.....	142
Morning Bells.....	145
Lesson of Labor.....	148
The Hand.....	152
Discouragement	154
Labors for the Future.....	157
Associated Miseries.....	160
The Shoe.....	162
Wishes	166
Good Will.....	169
Pilgrimage	172
Impressions of All Saints' Day.....	175
Paquerette—Easter Daisy.....	179

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE scenes described and interpreted in this book are but the changeable reflection of life, smiling and wretched by turns, noble and vile, ideal, or of the earth, earthy, but always interesting.

The tiniest crumb of reality, an ant at its labor, a child at play, a leaf falling from the tree, have always strangely captivated me.

As cold as the most learned deception leaves me, just so much the simple and authentic phenomena charm me. One part of the great drama is played there by actors without paint or bombast.

The attraction of living things is inexhaustible. Each, by an irresistible movement, becomes a sign, a lesson, a symbol. There is not a slender thread of a rivulet hidden in the valley that, step by step, does not guide toward the summit. All creation speaks to him who knows how to lend his ear. Of this voice of things, heard so often in whispers or formidable sounds, I have tried to note a few accents.

Permit me to offer them to you, known and unknown friends, in these pages now gathered together. May they receive from you as kind a welcome as their elders had.

C. WAGNER.

THE VOICE OF NATURE

THE KEY TO THE FIELDS.

MAN acts, but God leads him. One does not do what he wishes to do; and more than one has taken root where he had intended only to pass by. That is my case. Rural by nature, I found myself retained by imperative labor in the heart of a great city, and I shall doubtless die there some day, having guarded, in the bottom of my heart, the lively and loved remembrance of forests and fields.

While waiting, I profit by happy chances to escape from my prison at intervals.

Such was the beginning of an article that I wished to write for some friends, about the tenth of March, at Chene-Bougeries, near Geneva. It was interrupted by other occupations. I continue it now at the end of April, at Montana-sur-Sierre, in Valais, by the bedside of my son. Ah! the uncertain path of our lives, what turns it makes; how it rises or falls unexpectedly! There is the beginning of the article to which I was to give a following little dreamed of then.

The key to the fields was offered me, or rather,

forced upon me, and for longer than I should have desired. And now, in this Alpine solitude, where I am, the direction of my thoughts is oftener toward that Paris, from which so little time ago I congratulated myself on sometimes escaping.

When I say the key to the fields, it must not be taken literally. There are no fields here save those of snow. The plow loves only the plains and lower slopes of the mountains. It does not climb to high altitudes. One does not hear the laborer's whip, nor the song of the sower, but, instead, the torrents which run to the valley and leave deep ravines on the abrupt flank of the mountain.

But how beautiful is this solitary region of summits! What a seal of grandeur is set thereon! And how these giants of the Alps, immovable under the sky, make us think of that which changes not! Every moment passages from the Old Testament chant a refrain in my memory. The Book of Prophets and Psalms are full of imagery borrowed from the mountains.

"The Lord is a rock and a high tower." "I will lift mine eyes to the mountains from whence comes my salvation." In seeing them seated on their bases, ranged around that vast horizon, like white and imposing majesties, it seems to me that they are the witnesses of God—monuments that he placed there to say: "That which I have promised holds good."

And then, across the massive solidity of these visible things, the invisible appears to me, of which all that the eye beholds is but the symbol. And these

words of the Spirit sound in the deepest depths of my soul: "Before the mountains were born, and Thou had created the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God."

"The mountains will crumble, the hills shake, but my grace will not shake and my alliance of peace will not fall."

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

If the mountain is mighty, it is graceful also.

There is nothing so impressive as these contrasts. On the immensity of the ocean the light, snowy body of a sea-gull is rocked by the wave, or on the gigantic back of the mountain grows the little blue gentian of deepest hue. Oh, this blue! I think, when leaning over this corollary, of Him who said:

"Consider the lilies of the field; Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." And I cannot help thinking how good He was to attach His words of the eternal life to the most fragile things of the earth, and to send the message by a little flower. "Take no heed of to-morrow." In truth the gospel of salvation could not be confided to more gracious messengers.

And I shall not complain of having walked through unknown and dangerous paths, if, sometimes, in turnings where I have felt the most hesitancy, it was given to me to meet this companion, the most desirable of all, whose word reassures, whose look sheds light on all things, and whose words furnish the key to the kingdom of heaven.

THE LESSONS OF THE MOUNTAIN.

THE solitary tourist who travels over the summits of the Vosges, to the Ballon or the Champ-du-feu, crosses immense pasturages sown with a fine and hardy grass. In the midst of these fields, which Nature alone fecundates and cares for, the labor of man is seen but from time to time, under the form of a barrier of wood, or some primitive wall of stones superposed without cement. The eye is so much the more surprised to meet here and there thickets of beech, carefully trimmed, as if some painstaking gardener, who loved symmetry, had passed that way. All these thickets present the form of very regular cones, of every size, and the number is so great that one thinks with wonder of the colossal labor their shaping has cost.

And yet this labor has not cost one penny. It has not troubled a gardener nor a pair of scissors. It has accomplished itself with as much good will as knowledge. And it is the cows and the sheep and goats who are the authors. The first day of their arrival on the mountain, the flocks and herds attack the tender buds and twigs with avidity. They browse conscientiously to the last leaf, and the shearer who clips the wool from their heads does not work with greater precision than these thousands of sharp teeth at the service of the appetites ceaselessly renewed.

The same work may be seen on the fir trees. I have often observed in the Alps the diverse forms which

the trees finally take under the voracious teeth of the herbivorous animals.

Some die. The drain kills them. Others, where the cows have browsed on the hearts, remain dwarfed. Years pass and they do not grow an inch. They are there crouched down on the ground like a hedgehog in defence. But others, having kept their central growth, throw it up in the air with vigor. The very bites under which fall the young twigs and branches which garnish the base of the tree, multiply these, and at length make them grow to a vegetation rich and hardy. After a number of years, when the tree has raised its living crown toward the heavens, it finds itself furnished with a sort of spiny muff, which is absolutely impenetrable. Impossible to approach it—it defies all attacks.

Seeing these diverse destinies of the trees, those of men seem to me to be similar. We also bear differently the trials and difficulties of life. They hinder the growth of some, and exterminate others completely. But there are others whom the attacks fortify. They grow by the very struggle. The blows of adversity forge an armor for them. I admire those as I consider with interest the robust fir tree which has triumphed in its struggle.

Still, I do not know what sorrowful tenderness causes me to pause beside those poor little trees, stunted, conquered and mutilated. I say to myself that the same Creator caused them to grow; He made the whole of them, and knows what happens to each, and does not forget one. Their place is marked in His

plan. Is not also in that thought our consolation in obscure life?

Those who grow, grow by His strength; those who fall, fall into His arms.

THE TORRENT.

THE tides are the faithful symbols of human life. We talk of the course of existence, of its source, of the ocean of eternity; where all the little rivulets go to throw themselves, images of actual, individual life, and the great floods, images of collective life.

Like the tides, life has its storms, its tempests and its repose. It is troubled to-day, dull, seeming like torrents yellowed by storm. To-morrow it will be limpid, and the traveler, following its banks will distinguish the sand, and see polished pebbles on its deep bed.

A stained life resembles those rivers where industry empties its poisons. The surface is discolored with grease and dust. From the floating masses which cover them mount impure exhalations. In a pure life heaven is reflected as in clear water the hill sees its reflection and the stars look at themselves.

The gaiety of childhood recalls those alert little water-courses, tumbling adown the ravines, where the wag-tail wets his swift feet. Is there a word, a cry, a color painting human joy better than the infinite

smile of the sun on the scintillating wrinkles of a blue sea? And when the waves slow down, sobbing across the weeds, would one not say one heard voices of those who wept? The tide all around murmurs, sings, complains, growls, thunders. It has its caresses and it has its angers.

I observe the active man, of useful efforts, of generous courage, he whose life is full of labors and struggles. Is he not, in his noble activity, like the tide which turns the mill-wheels and the turbines, brings the ships, and makes fertile the fields and prairies?

The idle man is represented by the stagnant water where black reptiles deposit their eggs.

Like the bottom of the silent waters, the soul of the hypocrite springs surprises upon us. Do not confide in that surface sweetness; it hides traps, abysses. There is no more dangerous water than that which sleeps.

I am seated on the banks of a torrent swollen by the melting of the snows. What secret charm inclined me to follow it from its origin at the base of the distant glacier? But the more familiar I became with it while making my progress, the more I thought I could observe the destinies of a living being. At first it had trickled on the bare soil recently abandoned by the snow. A multitude of narrow little veins gathered into a great artery, and the course began, moderate at first, then accelerated until it reached an abrupt wall of rock, where it made a sudden jump into the gulf. By winding paths I rejoined my traveling companion—a little dizzy by its fall. It boiled and whirled in a

sort of enormous basin, from which it soon escaped to cross the pasturages of a vast plateau. There its course became peaceful—it fitted itself to the details of the landscape, idling in tranquil pools, stopping to play with the ranunculus plants.

Reaching the limit of the forest of firs, it was a descent, always more and more precipitate, down to this rugged gorge where the beauty of the spectacle retained me. Adieu the serene walk along the Alpine prairie! Here it is another world. All the powers seem to be leagued against the course of the water to hinder it from running straight downward in peace. Tree trunks are lying across its bed. Whole blocks of rocks have elected it as domicile. Against them the torrent breaks, foams, dashes in flakes and falls back in cascades, powders in fine spray which minute rainbows make iridescent at moments. In the distance the combs of the mountains ring with the fracas of the waters. Sometimes one might say they were formidable voices, covering a meeting of combating enemies. I listen; I look, marveling. I compare this proud torrent with the gentle idler of the pasturages above. How different and how much more beautiful!

In the peaceful course of a happy life man is like a transparent rivulet, allowing itself to glide through a sunny prairie. Let the days of adversity come, the assault of contradictory forces, the necessity of fighting, he will regret the hardness of the times. But if there is some latent virtue in him, you will see him reveal himself under aspects until then unknown. His soul, like the raging torrents, hurt against the rocks,

will grow in the breast of his trials. The hidden energy will awaken. Surrounded, blockaded, tormented, his inward force will come to the surface, springing from its prison, bounding at obstacles, and his most courageous actions, his most magnanimous transports, we owe, perhaps, to the difficult paths which he was obliged to pass in spite of himself.

TOO MUCH PROTECTION.

PROTECTION is a necessary function. Nature is everywhere provided with organs destined to fill that function.

The bark protects the tree, the cocoon the larva, the fur the bear, the scale the fish, the skull the brains. A special care is taken of all that is born, germinates, aspires to life or makes its first entrance into that difficult career. To be convinced of that one does not need to be a naturalist. It is enough to have eyes. Look how the flowers and leaves are enveloped on the bourgeons of the trees when the sap begins to swell them in the spring. No packer of jewels or precious objects can equal what has been done for the least growth in the hollows of unknown valleys. It is the infinite in the art of precautions.

In spite of that precaution has its limits. The normal regulation of all these beings has its risks, struggles, a part of their salutary rigor. Neither toil nor dangers are spared them. They grow in full effort and

degenerate in ease. After the protecting cotton the fortifying shower.

Human education does not know how to always maintain an exact balance between these two elements. When we protect we easily stifle. Our shadow is tutelary, but it causes that which it covers to perish. We avoid great risks for them, but we hinder them from developing character.

I consider as one of the saddest things of existence, that tenderness itself, and solicitude, may become a peril. It is so legitimate to love one's children, so natural to wish for them a destiny easier than ours when we have had rude beginnings. And that is why there are fathers, mistreated by life, and become men among sufferings and struggles, that rear sons who are not their equals. Grandparents, in whom all the human energies are found, make of their grandsons impotents and incapables by excess of solicitude. This danger is to be feared, above all, in families greatly tried. Having suffered so many blows of destiny, they enfold the newcomers with an almost unhealthy tenderness, and have no courage to be severe with them. The idea of seeing them suffer becomes insupportable to them, and, according to a picturesque but commonly used locution, they rot.

By hazard, during a walk in the forest the other day, I came across a symbol so expressive of this style of education, that I desire to present it to the attention of my readers.

In the middle of a field of ferns rose the trunk of a fir tree, sawn about as high as a man. The natives of

this country of Valais have much consideration for their backbones. Always when they cut a tree they do it at a fair height—not to bend their backs too much. The trunk therefore which occupies our mind just now stood there like a large pedestal of an antique column. Mossy, the bark well preserved, but the wood absolutely decomposed, it was invaded by a multitude of lichens and small weeds, and on its top had rooted two pretty little fir trees, six or eight years old. Brought hither by the wind, two winged seeds, escaped from a cone, had found a propitious dwelling-place. From the heart of this trunk, maybe hundreds of years old, they had sprung and prospered, in plain view, better than their young comrades around them. Impossible to have a situation more favorable. Neither teeth of goats, nor the sickle of the women, cutting indifferently the grass of the woods and the tender twigs; neither the tusks of the wild boar, nor the iron-shod feet of the hunter could do them injury.

In truth, that was just like two spoiled children, and I was ready to find their fate worthy of envy, when I began to think of their future. For the moment all goes well, I said, but after? What will they do when they are fifteen or twenty years old? Circumscribed as though in a closet by the trunk of the ancestor who protects, and imprisons them, they cannot spread out their roots. Their tutor will hinder them from reaching to the earth. They will grow stunted, and one fine day, when the old trunk, drained dry to the marrow—having nourished them with its substance—will fall finally into crumbs, its nurslings will bend to

earth—poor, uprooted things—playthings of the wind, and their miserable end will excite the pity of the passer-by.

THE OLD STOCK.

THEY say "All roads lead to Rome." But are there not roads that lead nowhere? When you have taken them they seem to lead east. And, while following them, you have deviated toward the north, and later, taken the direction of the setting sun. They were large roads, almost wide enough for carriages. They ended in narrow paths, which, insensibly, were effaced beneath your feet, leading nowhere. Such is the mountain road which I have just lost. And I congratulate myself for it. For it left me, at the proper moment, like an intelligent guide delivers you to yourself in front of a spectacle, which claims all your attention, and which the indiscreet chattering of your cicerone would spoil.

It left me, my road, and I had wandered a moment before I had perceived it. So long as it was there beneath my feet I was subject to all its inflections, like the docile water that writhes and twists at the will of a capricious bed. Now I see I am lost; I search the savage gorge, in which I have just fallen, with my eyes.

What a world, what beautiful chaos! There, above, enormous rocks emerge to the sunshine. Lower, near to me, the powerful forest clings to the abrupt descent

sown with blocks of all forms and sizes. With their roots uncovered, the fir trees clasp these fragments. One asks oneself whether the trees sustain the rocks, or if the rocks hold the fir trees. And the whole, at times, seems about to crumble toward the yawning crevice, from where mounts the voice of the torrent.

Few human beings have left their trace here. The woodsman who uses his axe everywhere respects this solitude. Why should he cut the wood? No one could carry it. Time alone, or the tempests, are woodsmen here. Giant trunks rot beneath the moss, and in a pell-mell recall in their disorderly fall the days of the cyclone.

Elsewhere forest ancestors still stand, dead and erect. Their wormy bark hangs in strings. On the dry branches long gray beards hang and tremble. One might call them skeletons dragging their lugubriously discolored tatters.

But, very soon, in all this picture, one point attracts my eyes and retains them, fascinated. One old stump, a vestige, doubtless, of some colossus struck by lightning, spread out to the sunlight, in a clearing, the vast system of its decorticated roots. She launched them far, like tentacles; buried them in the soil, like the claws of a vulture. For how long has this discrowned ruin occupied this place? Her state of decrepitude on this subject allows free imagination. But, no matter. She has found her employ, and the most graceful possible. In the angles formed by her massive roots, a colony of strawberry vines grow luxuriantly. A few vines have climbed to her head, and courageously im-

planted themselves in the softened wood transformed into a rich soil.

Among the white corollaries of flowers and the toothed leaves fine red berries show like laughing children. And the old stump, made young again by this gay vegetation, enlaces it tenderly with her skinny, grandmotherly arms. Before, when she bore a flourishing tree, nothing grew around her. All that was born died stifled. The tree has fallen, leaving in its stead a vacant place filled with light and air. And now what is left becomes the center of an intense life. Hundreds of vegetables germinate there, sheltered from the wind and protected from the feet of travelers. Open table is offered there to the birds of the forest.

Good old stump, the more I look at you the more you seem animated with a sweet soul. You are the image of noble lives, broken and bruised, detached from all personal happiness, consecrated from now on to that of others. In this unknown corner, full of majestic beauty, nothing draws my attention more than you.

The fascination of moral beauty in us must be very powerful. To efface all other impressions, an old stump of dead wood sufficed where our soul believed it had found blossoming a symbol of goodness.

VAIN HOPES—CHIMERICAL TERRORS.

THE strawberries must be ripe in the big clearing in the larch woods. It is a month now since we have seen

their first flowers. The other day, in passing there, we saw fruit as large as lentils, and some were already turning red. By this weather, mingled of gentle rains and the warm regards of the sun, the bays fill up and color in the hollows of the mountains like cakes in the oven. Come on, children! Get your willow baskets, and fill them with lunch. The woodland air makes us hungry. When the baskets are empty you will lay fresh grass in the bottoms, and fill them to the brim with those delicious wild strawberries, with their matchless perfume. Your sick brother shall have his part, which will give him pleasure.

And now we are off, and tongues are untied.

"Do you think, papa, that these baskets are large enough? To gather that mass of berries, we should have big baskets or boxes. Shall we go back to get them?"

"Oh, no; you can make baskets of rushes. We will give everybody strawberries: to our neighbor who is confined to his room; to the good old woman who walks with crutches. We will make marmalade, tarts, and preserves."

"Bah! Perhaps they are not ripe yet, or the birds have eaten them. Is it not so, papa, that birds love strawberries, and carry them to their little ones?"

"And, who knows, perhaps someone has been there ahead of us. That might happen; the passers, the woodsmen and their children. They know the forest well."

"Here is the big pond. We are half way. One more little climb, then a descent, and we will be there. The

place is on the hillside, and I could find it alone, I could."

"And you, Jean—where is your basket?"

"I have none. I will lunch with everybody. And if I find any berries I will eat them at once."

"But who is that woman coming from that path there? One would say that she came from the place where we are going. She carries a basket in her hands. There is red on the top. They are our strawberries. Misery! She has gathered them all. Poor sick brother, who was already enjoying them in anticipation!"

"Don't talk that way. That woman, without doubt, needs to earn her living. She gathers strawberries to sell. With that money she will buy bread."

"But that is vexing. I shall go no further. Do you think it is amusing to go so far uselessly?"

"What if we looked a little closer at her basket! Let us see if her berries are good."

"Her berries! She has none, the poor woman. It is only a red cloth which covers her basket. Under it is white. There are eggs. I breathe again. Quick, come on!"

"Here we are near the aspen tree with the top cut down. We must turn to the left here. But, what is it that we hear? Children's voices?"

"Is the place already taken? There will remain nothing for us. They will laugh at us. What a nuisance!"

"They are the children of the village, and here they come. They hold a handkerchief swollen with some-

thing which they hold in it by the four corners—strawberries without doubt.”

“Fie! it is awfully unclean to put strawberries in handkerchiefs. I wouldn’t eat them.”

“Good-day, my young folks. What have you got there?”

“Bran, sir, and soaked bread, to give to the geese on the pond. It is funny to see them quarrel over this food. They never get enough.”

“Good, we are trapped again! All these people have planned to lead us into error, and to make us languish and grow angry. What do you think, papa?”

“That you are all a little crazy. These good people go their ways without thinking of your strawberries or you. You attribute ideas to them that they have not got. It is unjust to them; and as to you, it troubles your mind.”

“Here we are, arrived at the famous place. We find traces of footsteps. Others have been here for berries before us. It is natural and is their right. There are not enough left to fill jars, but there are many, and fine ones. Brother will not be deprived, nor you, either. You will all be tired of gathering them before you get them all. And, see, you will not have what you foolishly expected, nor that which you as foolishly feared. Your minds are excessive; and you will find in this the just measure, the reasonable measure. It is no different in life. Remember this later when it regards things more serious than strawberries.”

Rarely is all we wish for given us. Rarely happens to us all that we feared. How much easier existence

would be, if we knew how to moderate our desires better, and command our fears more! But each one leaves them full liberty, and from infancy accustoms himself to be the slave of his imagination.

ON THE FRONTIER.

THE Donon is a ridge in the Vosges, situated above the Ban de la Roche, and passes, ever since 1870, as the frontier of France and Germany. I do not think that there exists anywhere in our Western Europe a more beautiful forest than that above. From the great mass of Donon innumerable valleys, densely wooded, branch out in every direction, and particularly toward the west. There are vast undulations where the eye could endlessly wander, and where the wind causes the leaves to shiver and plows hollows like the enormous waves in a verdant ocean. And when the tourist in descending the austere mountain plunges into the depths of the old forests, he finds among the firs, with their long, gray beards, and the beeches, with their light and gay foliage, an immense and inviolate silence.

Nothing troubles these silent passages, save from time to time the flight of a frightened kid, or a deer, or the formidable flight of a grouse—that king of game birds, whose wings beat the air until it resounds like the throb of a drum.

It is there, in the dreamy peace of the heights, the child of Alsace feels overcome by I know not what sadness, of which the old moss-covered rocks are the mute confidants. This implacable line of the frontier evokes in us, in the midst of the calm of nature, souvenirs of the war, of combats; and after, of conflicts with the people—those furious fights covered with human cries and noise of arms. More than one, in passing here, must have thought the place haunted by the demons of war.

In my turn I followed the forest path, delivered over to strange and somber suggestions. But it was in summer, afternoon, and on a beautiful but warm day. My footsteps slowed, and while warlike visions surged up around me and possessed my mind, there began around me an active opposition. The soft grass caressed my hands; the little wild flowers, like so many childhood's friends, made signs, called me softly, and I finished by ceding to the temptation to repose myself, after a long absence, on the bosom of my native soil.

Have you ever lain down on the ground, with your forehead lifted to the blue sky? Have you seen the sky, on a beautiful August night, through the frail reeds or the tops of barley balancing above your head? It is, I assure you, a fashion of looking at the universe that is by no means banal, and which inspires salutary reflections.

As to me, I floated between two worlds.

The back against that fatal line of demarkation and of contest, marked at regular distances by stones, to accentuate still more clearly the boundary, I had the

impression of being by the side of an eternally impassable abyss. I felt in my very marrow the cold steel which had opened this gulf between two peoples, made to understand and complete each other.

And yet, I know not what beneficent influence, what breath of peacefulness fell upon me from the immensity, through the branches of the oaks and the lace of the ferns.

At this moment I saw a little titmouse, with her black head, her beak filled with booty. She was there, French side, causing a light twig of a fir tree to bend its delicate extremity with the weight of her tiny body. But scarcely had I had time to note her than she flew away, on the German side, where she doubtless had her nest.

A bird crossing the frontier—what of that? Nothing, surely. But why, then, did this careless flight of the bird over the terrible line move in me depths until now unknown? I was trying to solve this question when I discovered, in the grass close to me, a series of busy ants, which came and went with all sorts of provisions for their families, and crossed this threshold of territories without other formality. In the luminous atmosphere were crossed those black streaks left behind by the flights of bees. Were these streaks the scratched out mistakes of diplomats? Higher, driven by a westerly breeze, light clouds coming from France floated over to Germany.

Burning zone of the frontier, where the spark is always ready to flash between two vast corps charged with opposing electrical forces, I saw you then crossed

by many travelers whom you knew not of and whom you did not arrest. I saw you crossed by the road of the ants, the road of the birds, the road of clouds, without counting that which at this hour my eyes could not distinguish—that of the stars. And if I could have followed the hidden work of the vegetation under the dark soil, I should have seen, under this same frontier, the trees fraternize by their roots.

These facts, as so many symbols, show me that certain heights and depths escape the lines which limit the surface. There is, in the high regions of intelligence and faith, and in the multiple involutions of the entrails, a power before which barriers established between peoples no longer count. Does all that hinder the frontier from existence? No. It is there, with all the painful souvenirs and the duties that it recalls. He is no man who can pass it without suffering and regret; without thinking of the country with a heart more moved, a firmer will to sacrifice himself for its defence. But frontiers are not absolute. Before being enemies those whom it separates are men.

In spite of the tragic seriousness of those ceaselessly disputed barriers, there exist higher than they and lower indestructible attachments. We must never cease to believe in that which unites us, even in face of the gravest dissensions and the worst injustice. Without doubt, it was to force me to remember that eternal truth, that the flight of a bird produced such an impression on me.

And beneath the dome of the forest, where the setting sun lighted a thousand fires on the moss, the

barks, the wings of the gnats and the beetles, I continued my road, thinking of the kingdom of peace where there will be but one flock and only one shepherd.

THE OLD SAWYER.

THE valleys are already filled with shadow. On all sides sound the bells on the goats, returning heavy with milk from distant pastures. The peasants await them on their thresholds. Soon the milk will foam in the pails, and the children will have whitened their lips in it.

Unrolling its solitary lines the road glides under the old forest. Through the gilded cones of the fir trees appear heights where the sun says good-bye in a feast of light.

It is the hour when at some turn in the road the iron-shod shoes of the old sawyer ring as he walks. His day's work ended, he has turned aside the flow of water from over his great wheel, to return to his home. With his white hair, his blue eyes, his pale face, his back bent under his large basket, this man from the first excites interest. His personality breathes of nobility and gentleness. But why is he so sad?

He has a great sorrow, the old worker. Illness has entered his home. For three years his poor wife has suffered from a cruel ailment. Confined to her bed,

she waits impatiently at night for the return of her companion. And he hastens his steps that he may reach her sooner. After the day of labor, begins his office as sick nurse. He carries chips to light the fire, and thinks, during his long walk, of a means to solace and distract his poor wife. Alas! she grows more miserable, daily, and will not long see him return to her, this husband so filled with tender love, and who watches over her declining life. That is why the old sawyer walks with dim eyes and bent back. And yet he is very courageous.

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At his post of duty at the first working hour, he may be seen moving the heavy logs of fir. Alone, with a movement of his lever, he sends them rolling on the chariot, adjusts them, fixes them with clasps, and then slides them while he unclamps the machinery. With an infernal pleasure the sharp teeth bite at the heart of the logs. Then, while the saw frays across the trembling fibres, and the logs become planks or beams, the old sawyer occupies himself with some business of secondary importance. At times he sits down, following the work in course of completion. Long reveries absorb him, interrupted only by the necessity of readjusting the pieces after each voyage of the log. He remembers old happenings. How many fine fir trees has he cut into different things—fine trees brought down from their proud height by the bed of the torrent. Child of that valley, he slept then in their

shadow. One after another, fallen by the force of the wind, or cut down by the woodsmen, they have come to lie on the chariot whose slow and inexorable march has something of the rigor of destiny. Cut into beams, laths, planks and boards of all kinds, they served to build all the cottages of the country. And when a mountaineer slept his last sleep, it was still the hands of the old sawyer who cut the boards for his coffin. To the young and the old, to the rich and the poor, he had furnished them without distinction. His brow had grown grave under this austere labor. Now, in the midst of his laborious days, when the thought of his dear sick wife haunted him and presentiments of the approaching separation weighed upon him, he had the impression that he ought to prepare the boards for her last bed; and the metallic song of the saw, making its way through the heart of the wood, seemed to grate on his very heart-strings.

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Near the roaring torrent the sawmill is voiceless.

The wheel is stopped. The water of the canal is turned aside—sign of mourning.

The sawyer to-day has not come up. His poor wife has ceased to suffer. At the sound of the tolling bell in the village church the procession of neighbors had carried her to her tomb.

Hereafter at the desolate fireside where they had loved each other so long, no one would wait for his coming; no one at his departure would say adieu.

Still he would go back in the morning where wait-

ing work needed him. Nothing would outwardly indicate his desolation.

As ever he would adjust the great blocks on the chariot where the saw would cut ridges.

For his wife's coffin he had cut boards from a very old larch, which had been struck by lightning the summer before. He would cut from the same trunk enough to serve him for the same purpose.

While waiting to rejoin his loved companion he fills his duties with exactitude. But his heart is absent. He thinks of her who has gone on before, there to that land of mystery and of hope. And his noble look, deep and dolorous, is fixed so often on that dawning land of immortal meeting, that he has gained from it something like a reflection of eternity.

ON THE BANKS OF THE LEMAN.

I FOLLOW the road around the lake, on the route which goes from Geneva to Thonon, on the side of Savoy. Behind me the town of Calvin disappears in a luminous mist, and by the beautiful sun of this late season the Cathedral of St. Peter is grandly effective, with its two towers dominating the hill, or the old Geneva entirely.

On my left the limpid lake touches the wall which borders the road. The transparency of these deep waters is a feast for eyes having so long seen the Seine, with its sluggish flow and dull tints, and the dark basins

of the canal of Saint Martin, where unhealthy fish grub on a slimy bottom.

Pretty white sea-mews cross in their flights through the air. A few steps away a little wild duck, stirring about and busy with his work, delivers himself to his exercises as diver. One sees him dive, reach the bottom, head downward, feet in air, nip the grass, stir the waved sand, then like a flash remount to the surface, to begin again a moment later. How happy this lively and fluttering little fisher seems to live.

In the distance, three boatmen amused themselves infinitely less. In a dead calm, on water unwrinkled by a breath of air, they tried, by means of their gaffs, to push a large boat along loaded with stones. With their united efforts their advancement was scarcely perceptible. The great trees by the bank calmly looked on their efforts, indifferent spectators. Above, in the sky, were little white clouds, which remaining motionless are of evil portent to navigators lying-to. Poor fellows! They sadly regarded, from time to time, the two immense yards where, like wings, their fine white sails hung idly. But these wings, in this hour, are idle ornaments. Truly there are in all trades days when nothing goes right. That is what I said to myself in pursuing my route; and in the silent air I heard for a long time the sound of the wooden shoes of the boatmen, as they poled obstinately, their chests bruised by pushing against their heavy gaffs.

At sunset, returning by the same road, all was changed. A dry dust flew by mingled with dead leaves. The breeze agitated the old elms so lately

apathetic. Swollen like a swan's wings, the sails shivered under the wind, and the boat, in its rapid march, traced a long white line of foam on the dark blue of the lake. One of the men held the rudder, singing the while, and two others were stretched out, asleep by the side of their poles, letting themselves be driven toward the port, like Ulysses, when the propitious winds at last carried him toward Ithaca.

That is what it is to have the wind in one's favor. If they had foreseen in the morning the good wind of evening, they would not have poled in the afternoon. But that good sleep after, would they have known it?

ABOUT OLD RAGS.

LAST summer, during a little excursion in Charente-Inférieure, they showed me a very interesting chateau, completely restored by the care of the proprietor, an architect of talent. This chateau presents the peculiarity of not having been originally built where it is now seen, but a good dozen kilometres farther away. Sold several years ago, it was taken down, piece by piece, and transferred to this place to a site more in conformity with its beauty.

We shall see how this enterprising proprietor has distinguished himself by other memorable actions.

One day a violent toothache (a happy pain, as results show) took him to a dentist of the little village. The servant who opened the door for him was just then engaged in washing the floor. Our man, worried as

he was with the pain, was none the less struck with the curious dress of the servant. To save herself from the dirty water she had wrapped herself around, from her waist to her feet, with a sort of dull rag, although a multi-colored one, which the connoisseur, at first glance, knew for a tapestry of great artistic value.

The offending tooth once out, the patient held a short conversation with the dentist, and, as if by chance, said :

“What is that strip of stuff which envelops your cook?”

“That? That is a piece of old tapestry, originating I do not know where, which has been lying around here a long time. If it interests you, I have others of them.”

“Show them to me.”

And the two went promenading across to an old shed, where a much larger fragment of the tapestry served to cover a lot of potatoes. Further on another piece covered a vat. It was all dirty, torn and without form. A bandy-legged Venus, an armless Apollo, made piteous figures before a Jupiter with his beard pulled out, and a bird of Juno without a tail. The visitor recognized in these poor rags some of the famous Aubusson tapestries, and showed his regret to see these precious remains put to such vile uses.

“Would you like them?” said the dentist. “I would much prefer a cask of your old cognac.”

The bargain was made. The scraps followed the visitor. A cask of cognac, of the value of six or eight hundred francs, emigrated to the professional.

Some years later, the proprietor installed two su-

perb specimens of Aubusson, repaired with the greatest care. He had spent a considerable sum (they spoke of twenty thousand francs) on this long and difficult labor.

"Come and see your tapestries," he wrote to the dentist.

The dentist came to see them, but left there furious, to begin suit at law. He said he had been deceived, robbed, and exhaled his anger all over the county.

As was just, he lost his suit. A droll story, is it not? Yet I guarantee it on every point.

What if we drew a moral from it?

People who guard traditions whose value they do not know, resemble this ignoramus of a dentist. They allow them to become moth-eaten and covered with dust. There comes a clearer mind which draws the traditions forth from forgetfulness, cleanses them from impurities, completes them in the spirit of old, and makes them shine like new and actual things. What do the narrow-spirited guardians, with their obtuse intelligence, do?

For the price of all pains taken, all services rendered, they cry "Haro" on the restorer, and try them for heresy.

THE TWO CUIRASSIERS.

THE room is vast and old. It is the most spacious of that old farm where a path in the Black Forest led me. Outside the snow falls slowly and silently.

One would say that among those myriads of flakes, suspended in the calm air, each knew whence it came and where it goes, and chooses its place before settling down.

Inside is an absolute silence. I hear the breathing of an enormous dog asleep under the furnace, and the slightest grindings of the wheels in the family clock. One has the impression that time is standing still, that nothing has ever been, and that there will never be anything any more. I let myself sink into the depths of solitude and forgetfulness, like into transparent and bottomless water.

In the house, no one. Only a little old woman remained in the lodge. Seeing me, a hungry tourist, she hastened to the kitchen and prepared breakfast. But this solitude is so good, this halt so beneficent. I would that the good old woman would stay a long time—always.

To my despair, my eyes fell on two large images fixed to the wall opposite. They were two cuirassiers who formed pendants to a tiny looking-glass. They are mounted on two dancing horses, both black, and coming at a grand trot. Each man has his sabre drawn, and there they are, ready to defend themselves. Why must these two accursed images recall in this tranquil place Europe under arms, barracks, manœuvres, and all that follows? Accursed militarism! where have you not come to find a nest?

And I looked at my cuirassiers, from afar at first, then closer. From afar they looked like the vulgar images that cost ten pfennigs, exact reproductions of

each other. It was surely the two sides of the same horse, with the same mane, and the same tail. Height and gestures of the riders seemed identical. But seen nearer, one saw that they pretended to be portraits of persons. A careful examination of the one on the right, a handsome blond with the head of a Suabian, revealed it to me. Then wishing to see more closely the figure of the cavalier on the left, I saw that the face was totally lacking. The place was empty. The man sat on his horse, stiff, threatening, having the attitude, the presence of a soldier in combat, all except the face. This seemed to me to be really singular, and I tried to understand it, when a delicious odor of cooking bacon spread through the room, soon followed by the old woman, who busily brought a magnificent omelette.

This was not the moment to speak to this excellent person of anything except her work of culinary art. And the best way to praise that was to eat it, to consume it, to do it honor, otherwise than in vain compliments. I did not fail, and on the benevolent and frank face of my hostess I could soon observe the happy effect of the mute homage offered by my appetite.

Conversation was soon established, and I could ask her then who were the two conscripts, of whom one had no face.

"They are two brothers," she said, "but one's face came unglued. Our young soldiers of the cavalry like this style of portrait. Being proud of their position they dislike to have photographs taken on foot, like simple infantry. To be represented each alone on

horseback would cost too dear. So then they take an ordinary photograph and cut out their faces and paste them on the images all ready for them. That gives them a grand air and renders them very glorious; but it is difficult to distinguish them apart, and often, as you see, the glue does not stick."

I quitted the isolated house where I had passed so pleasant an hour. By the white peace of the lost paths, under the dreamy fir trees loaded with snow, along by the rocks where the winter played fantastic tricks with frost and ice, I slowly regained the valley. And I thought of the men who, to give themselves deportment and appearance, framed their physiognomies in ready-made forms, of all those who take on airs, of a style, a language, of dogmas, where their individual mind and their individuality is drowned.

This politician, man of a clique, this believer, party man, all the sectarians, prickly, bellicose, on their rearing hobbies, what are they often?

The stereotyped reproduction of an image ready-made, where their own faces hold but an insignificant place, at least, if that face has not disappeared.

SHELTER.

NOTHING resembles the sea less than the sea itself.

Yesterday it was blue under a pure sky, and the white sails were mirrored in smiling waters. To-day

it growls. It has put on its gray dress of days of tempest. The waves break against the rocks with much fracas, and in the open, the sailors, wrapped in their oilskins, struggle painfully.

Is the sea grander thus, and more beautiful? It may be that your opinion and mine are indifferent to it. It cares nothing as to who may look at it. The proof of that is that it launches at everyone spray and sheets of water. Decidedly, there are days where one will do well not to approach it.

I withdrew into this pine forest to see and hear the sea without being spattered. The place where I am resembles a battlefield. It is not here where the zephyrs have their homes.

Seated on the powerful trunk of a fallen pine, I see nothing about me but ruins encumbering the ground. Broken branches, shafts shattered midway, splinters of wood thrown far. Everywhere the traces of the violence of the elements. I have just seen the pendant of that in a neighboring beach, where appear, half submerged by sand, the mast and keel of a vessel.

In a great number of things one always discovers something comic. This great pine, checked in its fall by two neighbors and catching on both sides by its branches, does it not look like a drunkard returning to his home sustained by the shoulders of two charitable companions?

But here comes the rain. Fine and hard, it walks rather than falls. The wind drives it and throws it in your face. The place becomes untenable. What shall I do? To return to the lodge would be too silly.

Let me take refuge under that tuft of green oaks. Improvised seats show that someone else has found refuge here before. One would say he was in a room. Neither rain nor wind can reach you. The marvelous hiding place! And how interesting to observe! On the side of the ground one enters it as though entering a cave. On the side of the sea it has the form of a roof beginning on a level with the ground and rising in a slanting direction up to a height of three or four yards. All the trees which form it are inclined. The wind has literally laid them low. Their attitude evokes the remembrance of the furious tempests before which all bends and breaks. By continually bending the trunk they have contracted a definite curvature.

Their rough trunks, full of knots, have ended by becoming deformed, and are twisted like a slave's body under the lash.

But they had pushed out on their backs innumerable little branches, forming a fleece. It is so thick that one could sleep on it without fear. Sometimes ivy, blackberry vines, or other climbing plants come to mingle their branches among the oak twigs, and the nest becomes thicker still.

And little by little it forms a roof as firm as a thatch, and under which one is completely sheltered.

Without the violence of the assaults endured, these trees would, like others, have grown straight. But their trunks, higher and more slender, would have been naked below. The rain and the wind would pass at their ease, and the traveler would find no protection there.

The more I look, the more my sympathy and attention are attracted to them. A soul's history seems to me to be traced in their vaultings and their entangled twistings.

There are helpful souls, souls hospitable and sure, gentle with the wounded ones of earth, comforting to weary travelers. Near them we feel in security, destiny seems less obscure, man less wicked, God nearer.

Penetrate, if you are capable and worthy, the secret of those souls. You will find there the traces of struggles, scars and mutilations. It is because they are bent that they guarantee us. Their torment has made shelters of them. And once more does Nature offer a symbol of the soul.

Never more will I go and sit down under the little green oaks of the wild coast without thinking of you, bruised hearts, made sacred by trials and misery, and who, having known tears, have learned to console others.

HOW WE MAKE ENEMIES.

IN doing evil actions, do you believe? You are not wrong. But often also in doing kind actions we reach the same result. This is the proof of it.

Under a leafy green oak, on which a climbing vine thickened the shade, the family takes a meal. Parents

and children do it honor, for they have returned from the seashore, through the deep woods, and everyone knows that the salt air sharpens the appetite, and everyone knows that hunger reigns in the forest since it drives even the wolf out.

Attentive to the needs of his family, the father carves and serves each with meat and drink. It was a race as to who should first ask bread or meat or hand his empty cup with an eloquent gesture. As to the youngest child, he asked nothing, for he had been fed, and the satisfied nursling sleeps in his hammock with closed fists.

Soon, in the dish occupying the center of the table, nothing remained of the roast but the bone. "What a fine bone for a dog!" cried one of the children. Scarcely had he finished speaking when a fine bloodhound came out of the thicket. Whence came he? Who can tell? Doubtless he was hungry, too, and the smell of the roast meat had guided him.

He was, besides, so polite, so discreet, neither aggressive nor teasing. Seated five paces away, he wagged his tail, lifted his head, and his quivering nostrils seemed to consult the perfumes of the meal. So much modesty gained all the votes. Impossible to refuse so courteous a solicitor; all are agreed, they treat him like an old acquaintance. Each one threw him a bone, and when he had eaten them, they gave him the one on the platter. Papa even went so far as to give him a drink in his own dish. The dog crunched all, lapped all and licked the dish clean, while his eyes said "more."

Too bad ; there is no more.

What will he do, do you think? Retire in thanking us after his fashion? Not at all; he gave us a cross look, showed his teeth and began to bark in his loudest voice. The children were afraid, and the baby awoke, frightened. It became necessary to drive the guest away with stones.

And that is how, with the best efforts, we make enemies.

This dog is the image of certain people to whom you have done kind acts, rendered service, sacrificed your time, loaned your money, opened your house and table. When you have nothing more to offer them they consider it as an offence, and leave you, showing their fists.

WITHOUT A WATCH.

IN the olden times no one possessed the exact time. They counted time, *grosso modo*, on sun-dials or by hour-glasses, often very imperfect. If the sun veiled his face, or the slave, whose duty it was to turn the hour-glass, fell asleep, the hour was lost. To find it again they had to go to their neighbors, or wait until a cloudless sky and the sun, that great regulator of chronology, fixed the time at noon.

To-day everyone has his watch. There are watches of all prices and kinds. Some, at the end of a solid chain, might serve, by whirling it, as an arm of defence. They recall by their size the famous "onions" of Nur-

emberg. Others are so small that one might swallow them with impunity. It would be difficult, in melting all the precious metal in them, to obtain enough gold to fill an American's tooth. These tiny watches nestle in collars, belts, bracelets, and even in rings. But the army of watches does not suffice. We add to these useful, portable articles the heavy artillery of large and small clocks, and alarm clocks besides.

And do we know the time any better? That is a question. So many clocks are in their dotage and so many are out of order, without counting those that will not go. But we are determined to know the time day and night. If the ancients were troubled about the hours, we are troubled about minutes and seconds.

With the present organization of our life it is indispensable to know the train time, that of the boat, theater, carriages, lyceums, schools, boarding-houses, military and administrations, and is an essential condition of a regular activity. In the bosom of the daily movement, in that buzzing hive which we call civilized life, a man without the time is a lost man.

The time spurs and hurries us. Watch the people running, and consulting from time to time their watches, anxiously looking at the big public clocks, and those in the windows which, oh, torture! indicate a different hour for each. The train will leave them, the school-door will be closed, the banks will have stopped business for the day, the foreman where you work will fine you. They are slaves of time, and not one can forget for one single minute that time is money.

Do not be so foolish as to inconvenience yourselves. It is always permitted us to find this tyranny of the time insupportable. Have you ever eaten at a railway station restaurant, hurried through a dinner in twenty minutes, haunted every moment by the sinister cry of the butler, "ten minutes more; five minutes more"? These dinners at the buffet are the image of our hasty and worried life. I always want to tell that butler, with his fatal brow, this miniature Satan, to "Get along, get along with your ten minutes."

In a reunion of friends where they talk and give up an hour, if anyone should take out his watch, I should feel like confiscating it.

What, because we were born in the nineteenth century, must we be constrained to have hanging forever above our heads that continual menace of the hour that flies or is coming? The tick-tack of a clock will dominate over all other music. We shall be fixed on that obsession of the time as insects are stuck on the paste-board of a collection.

No, indeed! It is one of the rights of men also to cease to wear the harness of counted days, and to live forgetful of watchmakers. However numerous the wished-for pleasures for which we render life bitter, all of us, I abandon them to you. Is there one which values the forgetting of time to race at hazard through the deep woods or on the solitary beach? To the tempter who may come in these lonely paths and offer to tell me the hour on his first-class chronometer, and in addition offer to give me the chronometer as a present, I would say, "Get thee behind me, Satan."

A certain watchmaker, being something of a joker, procured for me, for a whole month, the advantage of having no watch. A wave of salt water had touched mine. It stopped instantly. Salt-water baths, it seems, are fatal to those machines. Under the pretence of repairing the damage, this malignant artist, to whom the watch had been taken, kept it long weeks. Should I ever see it again? I began to weary of the pleasure of being separated from it. While waiting for it I owe to that incident exquisite impressions. Whole days, all in one piece, without seam or cut; vast days where it seemed that time had ceased to fly and had made a pause. Then, as it is sometimes necessary to know if it is the hour of repasts, or that of sleep, I owed the knowledge to signs which served to mark the time. What a bourgeois fashion, not to say stupid, to pull out one's watch and to say, "It is forty minutes after five!" It is as dry and prosaic as possible. How much more poetic and more interesting to say, "It is such an hour, because the shadows lengthen, the flowers close their petals, the rabbit begins to leave his hiding-place, the fish approach the land, the moon is rising, or the chickens go to roost!" When one has a watch one ends by no longer noticing these signs, charming in themselves, and which keep us in contact with the great universal life. The time becomes an abstraction, a mathematical quantity, a skeleton. It loses the color and the seal of living things.

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I advise everyone to hang his watch up sometimes,

unless he prefers to put it in pawn. Besides, to facilitate the experience, I assert my readiness to furnish the address of my watchmaker.

WITHOUT A PURSE.

MANY things stupefy the heart, or insensibly harden it. One of these is the inveterate habit of having money. When that habit has come down from many generations, and atavism is mingled with it, the case is still worse. I regard as a happy, ephemeral accident that which comes to cut the thread of such a terrible habit once in a while.

The more familiar one becomes with money, the less one knows its value and its part. Is it to go too far to say that our purse is one of those friends whom we must distrust as much as our enemies? Not only is it too complaisant, too ready to settle accounts with our imprudences, our prodigalities and our follies. Not only does it constitute for weak characters a perpetual temptation, but it also causes isolation. It hinders us from feeling the distress of others deeply. By having money at all times one at last begins to think that it is unnatural not to have it, and they risk believing that poverty is an aberration, if not imposture.

Happy is he who loses his purse, or clever pickpockets relieve him of it. For the moment he complains and groans, but the trial is salutary, and the lessons which

it contains are precious. No contents of a purse is worth them.

And at first there is rather an agreeable side to the accident; I might say, honey in the chalice.

You have just been robbed. If you are in a country where you are known, everyone hastens to your aid. They pay your omnibus, they take you to breakfast, they lend you money, they even go so far as to offer you their purses. Are these witnesses nothing? You can get along without them, you say. That is not your real thought. Whoever has not a bad heart will admit that they love him, and in case of need they would deprive themselves for his sake. However hard we have tried to be positive, skeptics, insensible, a little kindness touches us in depths where the purse does not count.

Still, if it is written that some day you will lose your purse, ask that it shall be on neighboring coasts. On stranger soil and among unknown people it would be different. Then you would taste the dregs of the chalice.

You have just been deprived of your money. From one moment to another you are to be excommunicated. Yes, excommunicated! There exists through the whole world a federation to which money associates us. Have, then, a little, you form a part of the fraternity. You have the means of passing where you will, of opening all doors, the means of making yourself esteemed and understood. As soon as your money is gone, your whole person is put in question. I suppose, in fact, that they do not know you.

With money you can procure shelter and food without showing your credentials. Without money, try to buy a little loaf of bread or to pass a night under a roof, and you will see surprising things. As soon as your money is lacking you will find yourself exposed to the most indiscreet questions. Who are you, sir? Whence have you come? Have you certificates, recommendations? For, in fact, by what right do you ask bread and a shelter? Am I sure of dealing with a decent man?

Do not tax me with exaggeration. These things happen every day. Pure illusion, to believe in the credit of good people. Their honesty does not cover any but those among their own class, their compatriots. A name, however honorable, a loyal hand, the countenance of a good man, protect one within a certain radius only. Beyond that their power diminishes, and even ceases entirely. Everybody cannot know you. As to your physiognomy, do not count upon it; so many impostors have a mask of virtue.

No, there is no direct and sure means of making others accept one as a man of means in a strange country when one is without resources, without notoriety, without any backing. And yet, I would not have you be entirely without some trials of this kind. They will cause you to reflect, and make you more humane. Nothing makes a man respect misery, nor hinders him from treating too harshly a passer like a vagabond, like having been once in the place of this passer, suspected of vagabondage. Few vicissitudes are so cruel as that of not knowing where to dine, nor sleep, and see

doors shut by people who are not half your equal. But if these rude rubbings of existence, these cavalier treatments, make us better and more clement, the experience is never too dearly bought. Take your trouble in patience, and even, if you believe me, try to seize the pleasant side. Any imbecile can be gay at home at his own table, among his friends and acquaintances, while in the bosom of social security. He has more wealth than he deserves, and enjoys a prestige often exaggerated. But to keep one's good humor when fortune plays you a hangman's trick, takes away your mark, declasses you and treats you like a barefoot, in that consists heroism. And in any case, that is not trifling.

And, besides, when those unhappy days have passed, aside from the acquired experience, one has the benefit of interesting recollections.

Just here one of this very sort surges up in my memory. Why not tell it to you?

It was in Heidelberg, in July, 1875, one Sunday night. I was returning from Goettengen on the way to Strasburg. But I stopped there to see one of the prettiest cities of Germany, and to hear some discourses by illustrious professors, on Monday.

I had passed the evening with one of them. In leaving his house I took a fancy to count my money in the moonlight. By what curious phenomenon was it that I found my purse almost empty? I do not know. But the fact was that there remained exactly enough to pay my passage to Strasburg, and make a frugal breakfast "on my thumb" in the morning. That was all. The least unexpected thing would reduce me to

the most painful extremity. What should I do? Return to the savant who had invited me? It distressed me to think of soliciting a place to sleep on, or to borrow. Take the night train for Alsace? But I wanted to see Heidelberg, and hear Kuno Vischer. To leave in the night would have seemed to me to be unworthy of a man.

My resolution was soon taken. I would pass the night under the stars. After all, on such a night it was almost a pleasure, and that would distinguish me from so many folk, who go stupidly to their rooms, by a sort of old routine, and sleep every night in their beds.

So I did. Already I began to taste of the sweetness of this out-door slumber, when a storm suddenly broke, and constrained me to quickly seek a refuge in the station. About two o'clock in the morning an employe closed the waiting-room. He put me out without form or process, brutally, as one might chase a dog. I ended by finding an abandoned shed, where I took refuge; and this night under the stars made me see anything but the stars.

But in the morning the sky cleared. Having washed in the Neckar, at daybreak, I went up to the castle. The sun came up. On every tree scintillated drops of dew like diamonds. On every twig a bird sang. The air was pure, all Nature joyous, and the solitude absolute. On the lower branches of an old oak a squirrel sat nibbling a hazel nut. He allowed me to approach, fearlessly. I could have touched him with the end of my cane. The blackbirds came walking almost beneath my feet. How confiding they are! I thought.

Could they have understood that, like them, I had no money?

I do not know what it was: the intoxication of joy that made me wish to sing in this early light, and to feel myself freer because I was poorer for the moment.

I would not give the remembrance of this experience for a purse full, and persuaded that it is for your good, I wish you, friend reader, above all, if you are young and fortunate, to find yourself sometimes without money.

A FISHING PARTY.

THE evening was pleasant, the sea was at ebb, and idly and almost noiselessly came up to expire at our feet. What if we were to go net fishing? This is the moment or never.

That is what we thought aloud, my friend and I, the other evening, and as soon as said we began to put the project in motion. But to fish in this manner, what is that? asks the landsman. It means to drag along the sandy beach a net thirty or forty metres long, and take therein the fish that approach the shore.

To do that under the best conditions there must be five or six, and seek the most solitary places, where the fish are not disturbed by people continually passing.

Here, opposite the lighthouse of Cordouan, the best beaches are those of the Grand-Cote and Bonne-Anse. Ten or twelve kilometres of route—a bagatelle. We set

ourselves at once to search companions; that is to say, men not afraid of getting wet or of passing a sleepless night.

And we found two professors, one from Bergerac, the other from Geneva, and also a locksmith and his apprentice. The locksmith's mother-in-law owned a donkey, with a name really predestined to this sort of escapades. She was called Sardine. Sardine was harnessed to a cart where there was room for the seine and our fishing clothes. Then she took the road while we followed the beach, hitting the cool, firm sand with our bare feet as we went.

Toward eleven o'clock we reached the end of our road, an isolated hut in a deserted immensity, dotted here and there with thin bunches of rushes. Sardine was installed in the hut; and we, tied up and rigged in old woolen garments, put the seine in the water.

This is how it is done. Four men walk in front drawing on a strong rope, a fifth is at the other end and remains close to the shore. The sixth carries the bag. This is an uncertain condition for him. When they catch nothing it is a sinecure; if they make a good haul he must suffer the consequences.

We walked along without speaking a word, with a regular step, pulling, pulling on the rope, with the water up to our armpits. The red fire of the Cordouan, the electric flashes from the lighthouse of the Coubre lighted us from the distance, and from the dark sky twinkled the stars so that there fell light enough to direct us. But what struck us the most was the phosphorescence of the water. As soon as one touched

the water it darted fires. Our bodies were surrounded by circles of light. The seine, in gliding through the waves, threw off white lights; and near us, under the surface, we could distinguish rapid flashes, some large and others small, and thin like rays. It was the tracks of the fish, flat or long, flying from the trap.

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Suddenly, from behind us, a whistle sounded shrilly. It was the signal to draw in. So we made an oblique turn toward the shore, and with a slow effort, our legs straining, we drew back the net made heavy by the water, the algae and the sand. At last it was on shore, and everyone sprang to look at it. White was seen. This was a good sign. A half dozen of mullets were there showing their silvery flanks. The bearer of the sack gathered them up eagerly. Then searching all parts of the net by the light of the lantern, turning the seaweeds over, and feeling in the sand, we found soles, small turbot, and rayfish with their poisonous darts, which all avoided touching.

As soon as the net was emptied, a cry sounded out, "To the water," and with water still trickling down us we went in again.

We returned to the water ten times, fifteen times. Sometimes the net was almost empty—that was a deception. But hope animated the workers; and besides, the night was so perfect! That alone sufficed for our pains. At other times the seine brought in good fortune. A large turbot fought among the meshes and slapped the sand with his tail, such noisy, resounding slaps as rejoiced the hearts of the fishers. All of

them were engulfed in the sack, and the bearer began to sweat like a porter. But it was two o'clock in the morning and the tide was rising rapidly. Already those who held the rope in front had received big salt waves and lost their footing for the moment. Wet completely over their heads, they renounced the labor, folded the seine and carried it to the cart. Sardine started back with the booty and the bundles of wet clothes. The fishers, in dry garments, walked back.

But at this trade the appetite develops. So the locksmith took care to light a fire in his spacious workshop and improvise a supper. Sardine had reached home first. At the moment when we reached there a delightful odor of frying fish came to our senses, and we did them full honor—our fish conquered from the ocean in fair fight. "How fresh they are, and how delicious!" That was what we said while eating, and drinking the thin wine of the country. And in the earliest morning light, to the accompaniment of the song of the larks, which darted above, we regained our domiciles with our portions of the catch.

In very truth, if anyone offered me choice of the most varied pleasures, I should choose this one: to cast my seine at the big shore on a starlit night.

WHEAT.

CERTAIN products of the earth, more than others, have a sacred character. Among them is wheat.

With the Greeks, Ceres appears before us always crowned with blades of wheat. The seed of wheat, among the Egyptians, was the symbol of immortality. With Christianity, by the bread which Christ broke, one evening, in sign of sacrifice and of the eternal communion, one could say that wheat has entered into the apotheosis.

Nothing which concerns it is indifferent to me. What poetry in the sowing of it! Regarding the black furrows, to which laborious hands confide the bread of to-morrow, Victor Hugo shows us the luminous evening:

“Reaching high, e’en to the stars,
The august gesture of the sower.”

Jean Aicard sings:

“That the great Napoleon dies,
And that they live fifty years in peace,
Thousands will laugh where but one weeps;
But let the bread fail at its hour,
The stupidest laughs not for fears.”

From the day when it peeps out of the ground to meet the last rays of the October sunshine, through the long hibernal sleep, the awakening in the spring, until the harvest in August, an uneasy attention follows the evolution of this blade of tender wheat, destined to become the nourishment of men.

In June is the high tide of these green waves, starred

with poppies and bluets. In the midst of these waves one sees apple trees stand out like islets. The cry of the quail sounds through the paths. And above, the lark, with its inexhaustible throat, shakes out his rosary of pearls.

In July the yellowed fields are like gold. One could say, as the ripened heads brush against each other with the wind, that one heard the grains falling into the measures. The bread sings on foot on dry days, but if the horizon is veiled, a shudder runs through the stalks, like in the hearts of the peasants. It suffices for a storm to destroy the year's labor.

At last the harvest, the barn, the threshers. Then the grinding at the mill, and the dough of the bakers or the housewives. The bread is on the table. Before you eat of it think that it is the fruit of the toil of man, of the sun and of God. Take it in gratitude and brotherhood. Do not allow a crumb to be lost. Break it willingly with those who have none. As the wind blows, the spring gushes, as the morning shines, the wheat must grow for all.

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And it is this wheat, liberal gift of God, laborious conquest of toilers; this wheat which all creatures wait for, which nourishes the widow, sustains the orphan; it is this wheat which you stake, and confiscate, monopolist! You put your hand on that which belongs to none. Have you the right to hide the sun, to make yourself gold from its rays? Have you the right to

capture the springs? You have no greater right to monopolize wheat. Your commerce is an infamy, a crime against humanity. It is a general shame that you are allowed to exercise it. Do not speak to me of liberty. The liberty of these makers of famine is privation, hunger, sicknesses, misery, death for the most suffering and the most interesting ones among us.

A woman steals a loaf of bread because she is reduced to the last extremities. There are logicians who declare it to be dangerous not to impose punishment on that act of anarchy. Impunity for such a wrong-doing might bring forth imitators.

How it is reasoned, that, how scrupulously just it is, with that strict justice which is the sister of iniquity!

But if it is dangerous that someone should take a little loaf of bread, what would it be if that other awards himself mountains of wheat, and puts the key to his storehouses into his pocket? To usurp the right to take a little loaf through hunger, that is anarchy, you say? I accord you that; but so thin! You must look at it closely to be able to see it. To monopolize the wheat is monumental, gigantic anarchy. It is an act of hostility against the whole human race.

So monstrous a privilege claimed by one alone, is the rights of multitudes rolled under foot. They find it simple, however.

As to me, known or unknown, I hate you, you who speculate on the bread. I put you in the ranks of the slave-dealers. There is blood on your hands and on your money.

Profaners, blasphemers, accursed traffickers, humanity must be a flock of sheep to tolerate such wolves!

A PEST.

THE train rolled toward the country where the springtime, so long desired and so slow to come, had at last made its entry. And the eyes of the travelers saturated with gray wintry tint, of narrow streets, and roofs spiny with chimneys, reposed on the snow of cherry blossoms, on the tender springing grass and the length of the woods and hedges.

Man will never tire of seeing Nature awaken from her long sleep. When the peach trees dress themselves again in pink, the pear trees in white, and the buds on the apple trees burst forth, leaving bunches of flowers to flow out of their torn envelopes, the saddest takes a new hold on life, and, as wine ferments in the cellar, in the season when the sap mounts to the shoots of the vine, human hope is reborn in the universal renewal.

Why must the whole mercantile tribe of grocers and storekeepers of that quality have discovered it, too? That race is pitiless as it is without ideality. We are created and put into the world to acquire their products and bear their advertisements. In public conveyances where we go, in the books that we open,

on the bench where we seek repose, on the wall in front of us, at the bottom of our plates and of our glasses, everywhere the desire for notoriety pursues us. The day has for its wound the posters; the night, the gas lamps which flood the eyes with their alternatives of dazzling light or dense darkness. At the theater, between the acts a curtain falls. You leave the society of the poets and become the prey of the indiscreet cloth which thus imposes its advertisements on your attention. Turn your eyes from the curtain and you will find the same advertisements in the paper in which you are trying to take refuge. At last you leave—you escape toward the fields, dreaming of purifying your eyes of all that multi-colored orgy. Alas! if you thought to behold Nature in peace, you count without your host, my friend. Your taste for Nature will serve the commercial interests. These are the first of all the interests; they will not allow you to forget it.

You love to see the daisies star the fields. Good! It is there that they will paste the poster which you must see. Suddenly, in the full joy of contemplation, you will see, flamboyant on a placard, "Bornibus Mustard."

A pretty corner of the woods seems to wish to attract your eyes; quickly they place there an advertisement, "Pneu Michelin."

In the field of Luzerne the "Biberon Robert" watches for you—on a roof is ambuscaded "Jambon Olida" or "Chocolat Suchard."

And the farther you go, the more the scandal grows. Soon the sides of the railroad become a palisade of

enormous boards, on which a lot of emulsions, and other things, impudently force your attention. No more free horizon, no more views which the eyes may seek from the windows. Between the advertisements of cocoa, beer, biscuits and shoes there might be places left had they not been taken by the different newspapers, each crazy to proclaim its million readers. The flotsam of the sea, the rocky flanks of the mountains, have suffered from the impure contact of the poster. Under their slave's livery they vaunt the glory of hotel-keepers and the delights of the casino.

Where will this inhuman fury end? For a long time more, I fear, we will be condemned to see its progress.

But in spite of the disgust with which it inspires me, I hate less this hideous travesty of our civilization than I hate an analogous flood sapping the spiritual world. Of this flood, the most extravagant advertising is but a feeble image.

It may be fastidious to fall into the hands of these makers of notoriety, but at least the conscience is not crushed so long as it relates solely to mustard, boot-blackening, cigarette paper, or spectacles that will not fall from your nose. The situation grows worse rapidly when you become the prey of these merchants of antidotes for political poison, and of sacred mountebanks. The commercial advertisement wishes nothing of us but our pennies. The other, when it says to us, "Take my bear," disposes itself to take us to themselves. Do you not find it odious to think that you are the gudgeon or carp sought for by these astute

fishermen? If you do not care you are more philosophic than I am, or you have the temperament of a batrachian. God knows how difficult it is now to avoid the industrials dreaming of capturing us for the benefit of a party. Their numberless engines are raised everywhere. They operate night and day, on land and sea, on voyage and at table. Hide yourself in no matter what solitude, they await you there. Not satisfied with speculating on grown men, they spread their operations to infancy. There is no age that is sheltered from their temptations. Even if they worked from good motives, to enlighten men, to convince them and lead them to the right road! But that is the least of their cares. It suffices to outline them. To lead them to a point where they will allow them to do, is to praise pure doctrine but little—they must deny that of their neighbors. The most active commercial opposition has invented nothing that has not been surpassed by these parties, to blacken and diminish each other. Three accidents, to-day, are to be feared; and, not to be too much surprised, each one should expect them: to be photographed unknown to oneself, and in the most singular attitudes; to be crushed by an automobile; fall into the hands of people who alone are right, alone have invented powder, alone love their country, alone know and unveil the mysteries of the universe and the plans of God. The human soul is the temple, and they alone have the sale of it. They have transformed it into a stock exchange, where each one cries his stocks to the end that he may lower those of his opponent. I detest them. I fly from them. A pestiferous rat is

less horrible to me than these men of obstinate ideas, these incorrigibles of the divine.

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But this is stopping too long before irritating abuses. Let us pass into an evil more subtle, but more perfidious. I wish to speak of the engrossment of the interior world by ready-made opinions, being installed almost everywhere. Have you ever had the pleasure of treading over snow virgin of every human step? That is a thing not easy to procure in this horribly trodden world of thought. Men have devised the map of the infinite, and put their signs, driven their stakes, set their tickets thereon. One cannot walk there without meeting a cicerone offering you his arm, or a predecessor publishing his pretension of receiving you. This monopoly of the world by closed systems resembles certain places where all is in gardens, and where the walls between which you walk hinder your view. The worst is that these pretended masters of the universe are only masters *in partibus*. That which they call the world is but painted canvas, masking the real truth from us. They hinder us from thinking, seeing, searching for ourselves.

They make us live in an artificial creation, and sterilize the mind. I pity the man who is embarrassed in the thoughts of another, poor fly entangled in a spider's web. I pity the unhappy one who cannot think without slipping in the rut of a remembrance, nor seek to express an idea without falling into a reminiscence.

Now, this man is the actual civilized one. His mind disappears under the impressions of the mind of another, like the skin of a Kanaka under his tattooings.

The greater part of us have no idea of the unhappiness that has come to them; they show it as the equal of a distinction. And, above all, they take their precautions to the end that their children shall be victims of it in their turn.

Our education is a conspiracy against originality, a vast plot against the danger of thinking for themselves. To kill their curiosity under a mass of teachings already made—to occupy every minute of time so that there can nothing of his personality enter in it, that is the principle.

If a fissure is found, if the programme is not hermetically sealed, stop the crevice with lessons carefully arranged, obligatory distractions of the conventional, and in sum, of the borrowed.

The social misfortune which we fear the most, in point of view of the children, is that they are driven by events, out of the organized society and its shelter, to live the life of vagabonds. But what is this disaster in comparison with that which menaces the man who has chosen his way outside of the beaten roads? He is, in the eyes of the bourgeois-minded, a vagabond without fire or home, and, what is worse, he is suspected to have fabricated his papers himself.

When I think of all these things a great homesickness comes over me for a new world, intact with unexplored paths, where the soul, alone with this great mystery, will never be troubled by the offer of an in-

terpreter. I dream of the gospels where no commentator has left the print of his fingers, of springs yet hidden, of marvels not catalogued.

But who knows? In that beautiful solitude would I not soon regret my fellow-beings and the comforting warmth of their contact?

The horror of the unknown world would take possession of my soul, and, doubtless, on my return from that distant and perilous pilgrimage, as one salutes from afar the smoke from the paternal roof, which, however, would greatly discommode us in the room, I would salute, as a happy augury, the first poster, and I should embrace, like a brother, the first camlet I met.

FLIES.

WE could get along without them. But their determination to live is very positive. They lay legions of eggs, a gage for the future. It is impossible to hope for their destruction, we will have them always. Their ancestors buzzed about the earth before man appeared, and over the remains of our race, when it shall have disappeared, their descendants will dodge about in the sunshine.

While waiting we are at liberty to think what we would of them, and to say it publicly.

You will scarcely believe me, regarding this irritat-

ing subject, if I promise to say nothing but good of these six-footed ladies. What would it be if the little beasts were to take the pen—if horses, cattle, all these martyrs, bitten, depleted, bruised and beaten, could give expression to their feelings when the ardent dog-star delivers them to that cloud of butchers?

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I have reason to suppose that in the flies' camp they have a slight idea of my intentions. An incredible instinct distinguishes all the whole plague of them. We do not say, without some reason, "A smart fly." Ever since my arrival in this forest of fir trees, where I propose to treat them according to their deserts, innumerable swarms buzz around me.

Gad-flies with empty suckers, terror of beasts of burden—and who take me for a ruminant—are here. Mosquitoes, slender, and delicate of taste for human blood. Big black flies, pest of cheeses and butchers, hideous mothers of the horrible maggot. These are the vile creatures, always drunken with rottenness, who take upon themselves the duty of inoculating us with carbuncles, and to carry complacently any quantity of contagion.

Then there is the ordinary house-fly, those of restaurants, of kitchens, of soups, having for their tomb a plate of honey or a cup of milk. Let him who never served as the sarcophagus of a fly lift his hand. Much may be pardoned this fly, for it does not bite, and amuses the scholar in his class, and the prisoner in his

cell. It is much better than you, meadow-fly, little hypocrite, with your azure wings, with all the color of the rainbow in your eyes, but with a sharp sting—pretty as a coliber, wicked as the itch.

It is not enough that all that list of vermin surround me. Imperceptible gnats also make a part of that manifest conspiracy. Flying in insupportable swarms, they do not realize anything of my discomfort, that is plain.

I am their thing. When it pleases them my nostrils serve them as a promenade, my ears their orchestral hall, and my eyes their bath.

Swarming race of flies, who shall ever number you, unless he has first counted the stars of heaven and the sands of the sea? Is there a number large enough to hold all your kinds and tribes? No; that would be to push impertinence to its fullest measure. Who would dare to ask a man this question, "What fly is biting you?" Can one know, among so many evil-doing insects, which one has chosen you for victim?

I understand that by a sort of respect to the Divine Goodness antiquity hesitated to attribute to Him the creation of flies, and they preferred to charge a certain evil genius, called Beelzebub, with having made them, and they called him the god of flies. What a proof of universal execration! And how the flies try to make themselves worthy! I see them at work now, at this hour, where I am the point of attack of their concentrated resentment. They have sworn, in lifting their unclean feet, that I shall not finish this article, where the honor of the corporation is attacked; and it will

not be their fault if the oath remains vain. Oh, what an infernal collaboration, in this assault of all against one!

One drinks my ink; the other runs over my paper, with the air of a furious young lady, making gestures of scorn at my prose. Many grubbing in my thick hair make me feel horrible sensations, as though it stood on end, while still others tickle the back of my neck, trot around on my cuffs, or drink from my lachrymal glands, or gorge themselves with my blood.

But they will not have the last word. Let us light a cigarette, burn some fir-cones. Smoke is good for something. Back, children of Beelzebub!

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We must admit that a fly is obstinate. They accuse it of being more than obstinate. Permit me—I shall not allow that assertion to go unchallenged. The donkey uses his legitimate right of defence. Poor burro, which everyone joins in abusing, you have finished by putting on a cuirass of inertia! Under the cries, you are deaf; under blows, you pretend to be dead. Does the stoic not use the same arms when he opposes an impassible brow to attempts of fate? Less stupid than those who beat you, you prove, in imitating the great souls of other days, that your gray hide is equal to their white woolen togas. So have they not also immortalized you, in tracing their best thoughts on the parchment that you give them as a legacy? You give service by where you have suffered; the stylet of the sage revenges you on the clubs of fools.

Who, then, would compare you with the flies? By what measure of inaptness could they put on the same line your patience in suffering, and his aggressive obstinacy, as obstinate as absurd? You do not besiege doors closed against you. Your dignity refuses to allow you to return to the place from whose threshold you were turned away. You go on your road, molesting no one, asking nothing in this world but peace. The fly, on the contrary, troubles that of everyone. It suffices to drive it away for it to return livelier than ever. His joy is to install himself there where his presence will most annoy you. Look at that sleeping baby, where it wishes to possess the rosy mouth where a drop of milk lies; that poor sick one, just asleep toward the morning! You drive it away from their beds, the importunate creature, ten times, a hundred times. It does not tire. Unless you kill it you will not conquer, and you would have no right to do that. And when at last you do stretch him out, dead, ten more come to the funeral.

Flies would try the patience of angels, if there were flies in the kingdom of heaven. While waiting, she stings the austere magistrate, whose bald cranium serves him as a looking-glass, and as the binocle of Belvedere. It unnerves the orator, whose face it furrows, in more senses than one, at the very moment when he is trying hard to retain the attention of a sleepy audience, himself occupied to defend himself from the flies, or to follow their capricious flight with his eyes.

And who, then, can equal them in impudence? Have

they ever respected anyone or anything? Where is the painting, the statue, the vase that is held a sacred treasure, human majesty, or the painful wound that is safe from their indiscreet attacks?

The fly has his entry everywhere. It is the symbol of certain men, without tact or respect, who make a business of touching everything, and install themselves in every subject, like a fly on one's nose.

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And yet, when they fall in the water or in my coffee, I take them out, and amuse myself in seeing them dry their wings in the sun, to dart away, happy to be alive.

And I look upon them almost like innocent victims of dark machinations, when the perfidious spider's web catches them in flight. Oh! when they struggle in the cords of the web, where their feet and wings are successively entangled, and the monster is coming to drink them alive, I can hold back no longer. I break their meshes and set them free. And for a minute, while they are cleaning themselves before my eyes, adjusting their wings, brushing their corselets, I forget all their mischievous tricks. I see in them but a poor captive creature regaining its liberty. Admiring the lightness of its movements, the marvelous neatness of that toilette, the wonderful structure of its large faceted eyes, it is not to Beelzebub that my thoughts mount. I say to myself that each of these insects is a tissue of marvels, and I remain dreamy.

There must be behind this world's visible veil an infinite wealth of wisdom hidden. Here is an ephemeral being, useless and annoying in our eyes. And yet there

is gathered in his structure a genius so great, that all men, reunited, could not create anything like it, or even come to understand it.

SMALL PEOPLE—GREAT EXAMPLES.

EXAMPLE is not like a copy-book which we are expected to imitate, abandoning us to our own proper resources. It is a force which goes from man to man, a sort of contagion for good or evil. In that consists precisely its prodigious influence. But a man may take a contagious disease by the illness of a child or an animal, and in this case the little and inferior acts on the grand and superior. The contagion of example, that, too, does not necessarily come from those who think themselves at the summit. It may come from those who, by a superficial and impertinent conventionality, it has become common to call the lower classes.

If the heroes and saints, the thinkers and savants, have their parts in the direction of the affairs of the world, the humble and unknown have theirs also. And many times these illustrious geniuses and the venerated benefactors of humanity have gone to seek their inspirations and their thoughts near to the small ones of the world. The small have need of the great; the great cannot get along without the small. I am infinitely touched by the lessons that God gives us by those masters without orders, those professors without diplomas, the unknown passers-by. Among others, I know two little rag-pickers, who have taught me great

things without ever having spoken to me, nor perhaps ever seeing me. I have often met these two companions, in the cold mists of morning, at the hour when men and things have such a mournful aspect that one hesitates to take up one's daily task, and when the moral spring seems stiffened and rusty, like the tendons of a foundered horse. They were already returning from their work, toward eight o'clock; that is to say, in December, just at daybreak, just when many others, even among the laborers, scarcely had begun their day's toil. Hitched to their cart, which they drew with a light step, they mounted toward their faubourg, rich with their early findings—papers, rags, bones, corks, sardine boxes and old hats. To see them pass thus, I do not know what helpful breath of courage blows over me, penetrates me, and has more effect on me than all the exhortations of moralist or philosopher. Had they not shaken off their desire for sleep, and taken up their harness again at four o'clock in the morning? Did they not do this every day, and in all kinds of weather? And why? To go and gather a few scraps of household leavings, or those of factories, tatters of papers or stuffs.

If such obscure rag-pickers, scarcely more than children yet, could find in themselves such an energy for such a labor, what energy should I not show in hastening to my labor—I, whose function it is to lift the fallen, and to gather up those who are being lost in human society! That which I go to seek in the night and in the cross-roads and by-paths of life—I, rag-picker for God—are human souls, rejected, like debris;

and the Master, to whom I bring my findings, is the merciful Father, before whom there is joy over the repentant sinner—the afflicted one consoled and the miserable comforted. Since they have suggested these reflections to me, brought this encouragement, I never see them pass, these young toilers, without emotion. But they gave me, the other day, a pleasure altogether particular and like a feast for the soul. It was Ash Wednesday. On that day, as after all great holidays, there is much to glean in the streets. I saw them, therefore, return loaded with packages, sacks full, where overflowed or hid the curious merchandise of a carnival. But in the middle of the cart, buried in the bundles up to her chest, there was seated an old woman. My little rag-pickers, with the aim of doing more work that morning, had brought their old mother with them. She had lent them her hand, and in return they were giving her a ride home in a carriage.

The young folks' faces told that they were happy to give her a ride and save her old legs. The mother's face shone with pride to have children like these, as good as they were strong. And I found such examples all the greater, because they who set them were among the smallest.

WHAT ARE THEY LOOKING AT?

ON the quay of Bethune, a group of curious persons are posted, immovable, with their eyes fixed toward the South,

From time to time, one would detach himself from the group, and go away, shrugging his shoulders, with an air as if he would say, "Bunch of fools." But others approached, lifting their heads and looking toward the same point of the sky as those ahead of them.

What can they see at that side? That is what I asked myself.

He who has never idled, himself, nor has seen block-heads stopped before no matter what, will be surprised at my question.

The best way to obtain an answer is to go and see. I go there, then. Like the others, I lifted my head and let my eyes wander around the sky between the dome of the Pantheon and that of the Salpêtrière. But however hard or whichever way I looked, I saw nothing, absolutely nothing.

I questioned the companions who were around me, with wide-open eyes:

"Why are you here, and what do you see?"

"We came because we saw others looking. We are doing the same, but have seen nothing."

I made the tour of the assemblage with my questions. No one had seen anything. Strange, strange!

After several minutes of sustained and fruitless watching, I, in turn, withdrew from the crowd, to which new recruits ceaselessly joined. But I was greatly puzzled to find the primary cause of all that attention.

These people, I said to myself, are not crazy, for I am not crazy myself; and yet I, like them, looked an instant, without seeing anything, or knowing why I looked.

Had we all been the victim of a joke? Those things happen. It would not be the first time that a wicked joker had taken advantage of the ingenuousness of the public.

One man stops in the busy streets and, apparently without motive, pretends to look at one place. A circle of spectators gather quickly around him. But he must be clever to fool the public thus. Generally he does not allow himself to be caught, and if he does get caught, he finds it out quickly. I do not know what there was serious and persevering in the phenomenon that made me think it had some authentic cause. Not one of the group of idlers in this crowd having been able to give me an explanation, I determined to address myself to the inhabitants of the quay. After a series of unfortunate attempts, I saw a fish-seller under the arch of a door, who recompensed my zeal.

"Why are they there, my good sir?"

"I will tell you. About an hour ago a balloon disappeared in that direction, and ever since there is a crowd to look."

I was at last satisfied. A fact had passed in that place. A balloon had appeared to the sight of these people, then had sailed away toward the south. Once the real ocular witnesses of this had gone, those who followed them continued to look in imitation, but without knowing what it was all about.

How many analogous phenomena in the history of men! Never make fun of those who stand there, the eyes lost in some corner of the sky, where you see noth-

ing. Above all, do not believe in an imposture lightly. Since the attention of humanity is obstinately fixed on some point, be sure that something real and great has passed that way. With a little patience and serious thought you can convince yourself of it.

ON THE DEATH OF THE FLOWERS.

WITH hurried steps, a commissionaire hastened away, carrying, pell-mell, gathered between his arms, hung over his shoulders, a half dozen baskets of flowers, jardinières full, and all lamentably faded.

On the naked carcasses of the great willow arches, the bows of ribbon hung, giving the effect of laces on skeletons. The opulent flowering of these overflowing bouquets was reduced to a few blades, where the dead leaves and the corollaries of a dirty yellow trembled. Of the uncrowned daisies there remained but the hard hearts; the roses, after the fall of their petals, were nothing but frightful buds on their thorny stems. Two lilies, graceful still, bent their heads sadly, seeming to weep over all this desolation. The man, dragging his load, seized them brutally, like something entirely valueless and of which he must get rid.

But, on the passage of these flowers, it was curious to observe the faces of the observers. They stopped, turned, following him with their regard, as they follow

funeral processions. A respectful pity betrayed itself in their eyes and in the attitudes of the most of them, and their thoughts could be imagined: "Poor flowers, withered and dead; and how that clown shakes them, and carries them ungallantly to their grave." Some, rare, though, shrugged their shoulders, as do certain people seeing an infirm person pass by. Thoughtless gamins made comical gestures. A fat coachman, camped like a bronze statue on the edge of the sidewalk, turned his face, so jolly and rosy, on these remains—more rosy and flourishing in contrast to so much withered slenderness. It appeared to give him something to reflect upon.

Altogether, these flowers made a picture and created a sensation. Poor débris of some fête, a birthday, a betrothal, they awoke the idea of our fragile lives, exciting, above all, tenderness and compassion. It is worth the trouble to compare the departure of the flowers with their arrival. When they come, fresh and bright, like pretty young girls dressed for a ball, those who bring them are in their glory. Proud of their load and the admiration which it excites, they have the air of carrying a holy sacrament. On their road children's hands are extended: "Oh, what beautiful flowers; give me one!" Women open their eyes and dream of the happy mortal toward whom these flowering homages are sent. It is a continual rumor of voices, of exclamations and remarks. And these remarks are not always kindly; above all, if the baskets are rich and the bouquets extra fine. Their luxury then awakens envy: "What luck to be able to afford such beautiful things."

The positive people are set on edge: "They must be stupid to spend so much money on such follies." Others, and not always wrongly, murmur: "Ah, these well-fed and selfish bourgeois; they allow themselves such fancies, while the poor are starving."

So the least pretext suffices to reveal the hearts of men, and to drive each one to manifest what is in him. It is not needed that an illustrious citizen should be buried, or that one of the great people of the earth should pass with his funeral escort. A flower brought or taken away suffices, and the eternal question of our destiny, the passions of the day, the holy pities, like the great angers and the base jealousies, are there, all ready to agitate themselves on its passage.

AN ACT OF JUSTICE.

THE slowness of justice causes the despair of upright consciences, eager for clear situations and equitable retributions. But when, by exception, the chastisement follows the crime, striking just, and striking quick, it is a comfort and a satisfaction. With the aim of procuring for himself these comforting impressions, it is not rare that man intervenes in the causes. He hastens the solutions, precipitates the denouements, realizes summary justice, little allied to justice of the law. I have just now found another example *in anima*

vili. One can say that doubly, since it relates to an old horse on the way to the slaughter-house.

We are, one Wednesday afternoon, at the Boulevard of the Hospital. On the dome of the Salpêtrière the clock marks three. It is the hour when the horse market, established in this neighborhood, was about to close. By the gate of the immense grounds the horses came out, horses of all sizes and values. Handsome teams, with glistening hair, and heads held high in air. Big Percherons, with heavy, measured steps, able to draw a truck or a tumbril, and ponies, the delight of childhood. The higher the price of the horse, the better he is cared for, and the cleaner and more careful the jockey. His cares, also, are measured by the value of the merchandise.

But now come the poor old horses. In their turn they come from the market. But, instead of going toward the city like the others, they turn to the right, and begin to mount the steep side of the Boulevard.

The temporary grooms led them. It was the last lap. Above they will make a half turn, and they will enter the slaughter-house.

This defile of poor limping hacks on the way to their death was a melancholy sight. Their thin skins were pierced by many holes, and scarcely hid the bones. Their legs were knotty and twisted, like the roots of an oak. As payment for their existence of labor they are to receive a thrust of a knife. Poor old carcans, I follow, with my eyes, along the Calvary that you are climbing, and I see your cruppers bend beneath their load. Without doubt you bear your part of inevitable

pains; but how much they are aggravated by the iniquity of men! So it is not rare to see this supreme voyage accompanied by blows of a cudgel. There is no need of being kind to this equine clientele. They could bang on them with impunity.

We were there, standing on the sidewalk, watching this lamentable cortège pass, when a revolting scene took place.

A young groom, finding that his horse did not go fast enough, began to beat him furiously. He beat him over the head, his eyes and nose, all the time holding the horse by the bridle. When his arms tired he began a series of kicks in the stomach and flanks. The poor horse, completely crazed, tried to rear and fell on the pavement. The spectators were indignant. One workman stepped out from the group and began to make observations to the wretch, who did not receive them well. The affair grew warm. Soon we saw the fist of the workman lift and give the groom a majestic blow.

From the sidewalk a bravo saluted the avenger. But that made the avenger lose his measure. Encouraged by the consent of the gallery, he fell upon his antagonist with his fists. A guardian of the peace intervened, and took both men to the station-house. The avenger made me a sign to follow, and I did. As a witness before the commissioner, I gave an impartial account of the affair. I learned afterward that the case was dismissed.

But things followed it. For the groom there was a very black eye, and for you, readers, this story.

This trouble was caused by the rôle of instant justice. There is no grander one, but it is terribly difficult.

When the first avenging blow fell upon the head of this wretch, enraged against this poor dying brute, it was like a flash of lightning of manifest justice. The cry of approbation which it drew from us was legitimate. And yet this cry had brought such an excess in the repression, that the victim of it became almost interesting, and the avenger appeared to be the human brute. We had awakened this brute by our applause. The intention was just, the result awful. A fate common enough of human actions. And before the question, whether to let them continue, or intervene, in such a case, we would remain in a terrible indecision, if we have not the inward light for guide. It is for that to teach us. It will say: "When you abstain, distrust your softness; if you interfere, it is of your ardor that you must be on your guard."

A CAT IN THE WATER.

Two hundred persons were leaning on their elbows against the parapets of the little branch of the Seine, running between Notre Dame de Paris and the remains of the old Hôtel Dieu. New curiosity seekers gathered incessantly. They raised themselves on their toes and looked over the shoulders of the earlier ar-

rivals. To see them from afar, they seemed like people completely fascinated by a powerful drama—a suicide, perhaps, or a stirring rescue.

Not to lose anything of such a spectacle, passengers got down from omnibuses, and the small merchants quitted their booths and crossed the quay.

Now, what was happening? A cat in the water. Yes, a gray and white kitten, and about half grown. The poor little thing had a string around its neck. But the stone, which doubtless had been fastened to it, had become loosened, and the animal, emerging from the bottom, a part of whose viscous mud was to be seen on its face, swam, struggled and tried to escape the waters.

By great misfortune there are high walls all along the banks, worn smooth by the water, and offering no foothold, even for the paws of a cat. When it had vainly sought, on one side of the banks, a place where he could hoist himself out of the water, the swimmer, at bay, turned to the other side, painfully traversed the canal, and at the end of these infructuous efforts encountered the same obstacles.

Now he catches on some small projection of the stone and succeeds in pulling himself up half out of the water. But he cannot maintain himself there, and at the end of a minute he has fallen back, entirely submerged.

Returning to the surface, he recommenced his struggle, but with a slower movement. From time to time he gave a pitiful little cry, that we saw more than heard, lifting supplicating eyes toward the spectators

above. They, more and more captivated as the scene was prolonged, took the part of the dying creature, which defended itself with such an obstinate hope. When it seemed to reanimate itself, a murmur of satisfaction traversed the gallery; if it appeared weaker, there was a mournful silence. Each one, in reality, seemed to have, in a measure, identified himself with the fate of this life in distress, whose safety or destruction would be for all a good or bad omen.

Suddenly, a young boy appeared, one of those whom we meet everywhere where there is anything going on. Scarcely had he understood what it was all about, than four by four he bounded down the steps toward the landing. By a prodigy of cleverness he managed to let himself down within a short distance of the water by means of one of those large iron rings where the boats tie up. He held to this by one leg, and balancing out into the empty air, he threw to the little swimmer the end of his woolen scarf.

The cat, on the point of going down forever, gathered its last strength and caught its claws in the saving scarf. In an instant, like a fish on a hook, he was thrown up on the bank, where the boy rejoined him in a moment.

Then a thunder of bravos burst out all along the parapet, and the lad, red with emotion, ran away with the conquest he had made from death itself in his arms.

O, mysterious power of life! We may disown you, and walk with a brutal step on your marvels. We even may, when delivered over to perverse impulses, find a pleasure, at certain moments, in destruction; but an

hour comes when, by that very thing that the drama of life and death unfolds, poignant, before us, it is for life that we wish evil to all its enemies. A busy crowd suspends its action, misses appointments, neglects its business, and becomes enthusiastic in favor of a cat that does not wish to die. And the mocking boy, who usually breaks windows, torments animals and laughs at the authorities, becomes the savior of the creature, at the risk of his own life.

Let us recognize in this the influence of the Sovereign Will, having willed that life should be sacred to all creatures, and which manifests in the best of men the sublime instinct of self-devotion, and in trying to save that which is lost.

THOSE TO WHOM WE LISTEN.

IN class, it is the masters who instruct the children. Between the classes life offers them lessons. There are anonymous and impersonal ones. All the views of fields and woods speak to the child.

But it happens, also, that there are on the road of the scholar escaped from school, real teachers, whose intervention sometimes marks a life. The more populous the centers, the more numerous are these teachers. It is difficult to escape them, and they are far from being of the best quality.

I have just seen a lesson of this kind, which bore its fruit on the spot. You shall see how.

It is Thursday. On the edge of the quay Henri IV., the whole length of a port encumbered with boats, a troop of scholars are amusing themselves among the merchandise being discharged. They hustled each other on the planks, climbed mountains of bundles to let themselves come rolling down like casks. They halloed into the bungholes of empty hogsheads to hear the echo. Some of them tried to read the tickets on the different cases whose contents puzzled them. In passing they teased horses or donkeys, played tricks on the boatmen, or jumped into the small boats which balance behind the pinnaces. From time to time, a Custom House employe appears. Then the boys disappear like rabbits in their burrows. But as soon as he is gone they reappear, finding their heart's delight in touching everything, annoying everybody, until some stevedore, black with coal dust, apostrophizes them in his hoarse voice with a club in his hand. The boys disappear again like sparrows. A minute later they are elsewhere, always gay, always ready to recommence their tricks.

They now pass near a storage place for hogsheads, which were stood closely around the place. There was no etiquette. "What is inside of them? It cannot be wine. The heads are of white wood. But here is one where the bottom is broken a little. What if we took hold of the stave and pulled a little? Come on, hard."

It cracks under their efforts, and big chunks of resin fall to the ground.

At the same minute one of the boys takes a large piece and hides it in his blouse.

"Leave that!" cry the others. "That does not belong to you."

"Bah! they put it on wood. I will melt it and fix kindlings for my mother to light the fire."

And they start away. A workman has seen them. He stops them, and lays hold of the little delinquent, and says:

"You will put back what you took, and quick, too."

The child was about to do so, when a ragged man, one of those who sleep on the bridges and wash their only shirt in the Seine, on bright days, and dry it in the sun, intervened. He understood what had happened.

"Don't listen to him," he said to the boy, now ready to bring back the resin. "You would be very stupid not to keep it. What we find we keep. There remains enough more."

Then, turning to the other children, he said to them:

"Don't hesitate. Why should you? Go ahead. I give you permission, and you, big boobies, you are not going to hinder young folks from amusing themselves."

Upon that, three-quarters of the boys rolled onto the disemboweled hogshead, filled their pockets and their aprons, and disappeared like a flock of freebooters hastening to put their booty in a safe place.

And the tatterdemalion went his way, his hands in

his pockets, with an air of saying, "I have not lost my day."

We must not take the misdeeds of children too seriously. Their natural turbulence draws them on. They are often better than their actions. Still, I went from there, thoughtful, perplexed, having once more learned, in the presence of both good and evil counsel, which are the ones listened to.

MOVING.

THE October term has passed. One can breathe until January, now. Suppose we talk a little about moving.

People never moved so much as now. The country moves to town; the town to the country, the beaches and the mountains.

In our great centers the population is the prey of perpetual motion. On certain days the migration is so great that it impedes circulation. It seems that all the furniture of the inhabitants is in the street.

Get up a directory with the addresses of people of all situations. At the end of two or three years, if you would keep informed, it would be so full of erasures and additions that you would have to copy it all off.

Civilians move less often than the military; the bourgeois less often than the laborer. The record of these movings belongs to the functionaries, and among

them the frequency of the displacements seems to be the cause of the importance of the functions. Across the summits of hierarchy, as on the high mountain ridges, tempests blow, and are perpetual menaces for the great personages. A rural letter-carrier, or a forester, is surer of his to-morrows than a judge or a minister.

If we are movers, in the proper sense of the word, we are so, still more, in a figurative sense. Here I think, not of our changeable humor, nor that feverish agitation which makes us think sometimes that all the world is crazy—mentality gracefully defined by the indulgent euphemism, "he is moving." But I think more of the profound changes which have taken place in our spiritual dwelling. The ancient secular shelter for souls, and the secular shelters of human thought, have undergone such modifications that we do not know them any more. In spirit, above all, it becomes rare to have a paternal house, to live and die in the ideas and beliefs of one's forefathers. Nothing is any longer in its place. Man has moved his ideas, his mysteries, his dogmas, his heroes, and even his divinities. He had loaded his holdings of faith and hope on these provisional vehicles, and he drives all that beneath the great sky, anxious to find another country. Perhaps humanity has never felt in a more melancholy fashion the truth of these antique words: "We are but pilgrims on this earth; we have here no permanent city."

When will it be given us to enter in a hostelry where they lodge more than a night, to raise our tents, to

build our house, to repose ourselves at last for a durable time in a real country of soul? God alone knows. But perhaps this time is less distant than we dare suppose.

While waiting, in the way of moving I saw something most unreasonable.

On one of the exterior boulevards I saw, riding along, upright, balanced between four wheels of a wagon, a large tree with all its branches. On the tree was a nest, and around this nest two little birds flew, screaming.

So this nest, symbol of peace and security, this gracious image of inviolate hiding-places, is not even sheltered from movings. They transport it, with the tree where it was hung, with the earth, even, around which the tree had fixed its roots.

Was not that the overflowing of the measure of moving-days?

TO BETTER ONESELF.

WHAT will not one do to better oneself? It is human to aspire to more comfort, and to seek means of ameliorating one's position; and when at times, when things go badly, should we be surprised to hear the cry, "Suppose we change"? The sick one turns in his bed. The tenant, angry with his miserly landlord and irritating concierge, says angrily, "Let us move."

Tired of being robbed on the shores of the blue sea, the tourist takes refuge in the hotels of Switzerland.

To better themselves women change servants, and servants change mistresses; functionaries change their posts; the Chambers, the ministry; the electors, the deputy; the people, the government.

Are they really any better after it all? Will they not find the same old inconveniences under a new form? It is possible. But they will have had the hope of being better, even if in the end they are worse off. I have seen families leave rue Quincampoix on account of bad air, and install themselves in rue Maubee "to better themselves." It was to change the microbes, and that was all. But I understand these absurd actions, having done the same things myself. I never could resist the desire to change to the other sidewalk when in the mornings the housewives shake the dust out on the passers' heads. But how often, however, while trying to avoid the dust of a rag shaken every day, I went and threw myself beneath a rug that they beat only every six months! But that does not matter; I shall change the sidewalk every time. It is a solace to change; to change occupies one, distracts the mind, and procures for it a little illusion. Is it not at least that much?

* * * * *

People change, also, through enervation. As soon as a thing lasts there are some who feel uneasy. That Aristides was called "The Just" for a time was bearable.

But if it continues too long they begin to cry "Enough!" and the story of change is repeated. They calumniate Aristides, they accuse him and they condemn him. Why, then, was he called "The Just"? Is there anything so monotonous as length? What indecency, and impertinence besides, towards those who are not just!

Happiness itself, when it lasts, incites change. A series of uniformly happy days is wearying, do you know? It is comparable to a dead calm. Save yourself from being becalmed. A little storm, if you please. Invent something which will set folks in a fury. We find it irksome here—let us start a revolution.

* * * * *

For many unhappiness consists in being obliged to remain in one place. They are afraid of taking root. A fever agitates them and drives them from place to place. They are always buckling their trunks. Thus they can never seem to stop at any definitive determination. To-day a resolution is taken; they burn their vessels. So it is irrevocable. Know your world better. At the precise instant when everything is fully decided a change has taken place in their minds. The very fact that they have said *ne varietur* makes them believe that they have sacrificed their liberty. Hereafter they will sigh for other things, such as the forbidden fruit or the lost paradise.

But, beneath this perpetual movement, this surface change, one thing germinates, grows and becomes indestructible, and that is routine. These changeable

men are the most untractable slaves of habit. The people of unstable and versatile temperaments are most given to routine. "The more it changes, the more it is the same thing." No proverb is truer than that. The history of nations resembles the oscillations of a swing. It is the perpetual movement, joined to an invariable tick-tack.

To-day it is the tyranny from above, to-morrow from below. All that is called change, but is not in reality. The wheel turns, but keeps its place.

The troops of the figurantes in a theatre go out by one door and return by another. The superficial observer does not perceive it. He has the illusion of an immense motley crowd, of an inexhaustible multitude. He who knows the lines knows very well that these archers, halberdiers, arquebusiers, cavaliers and *tutti quanti* have but to change their costumes in the wings. He will tell you, pointing to such or such a one, a valet, that he was a chevalier just now, and indicating a monk as the brigand of the second act. Alas! one does not need to be a great physiognomist to recognize in this file of historical characters, under their different costumes, the same individuals, red or white, imperialists or Jacobins, planters of the tree of liberty or sinister wood-cutters who cut it down to make wood to warm the feet of Cæsars. One does not need to be a great prophet to say, regarding the scene of to-day, what it will be to-morrow, or the day after. It is marked out like music-paper, like the bill of fare of encrusted housekeepers. We are not any further advanced. That is what we should say. Then we would no longer see

passionate crowds, nourished with illusions, turning around ceaselessly in the same circuit, drawn by deceptive promises, and imagining that the earth is going to be transfigured because the comedians have changed their costumes.

One only change becomes important, that which bears on the inward man. No one wishes to know anything of that. And yet it is there that we should begin "to better ourselves."

WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN.

It is very grave. It is the question of the existence of several families—of sparrows.

In the country these birds are considered as enemies, because they love to pick at the ripened wheat-heads. They forget that in the spring they live on caterpillars and beetles. In cities there is no harvest to spoil: the sparrow is the friend of everybody. For me, I am grateful that he is there and remains even during the winter. We have, it is true, rooks, pigeons and numbers of blackbirds with yellow beaks. But they are the guests of the public gardens, old towers or some green corner. There are only enough of these for the privileged ones. The sparrow is universal. He inhabits all quarters without distinction. He is found in barracks, in schools, convents and prisons. He sings under the windows of the poor, enlivens the doughty

heads of schools, and jumps in the fine sand of the private parks of the aristocrats. At the Louvre he nests in the sleeves of the great ones or the casques of the warriors; at Notre Dame, in the beards of the saints.

He has no haughty pride, nor prejudices, nor vain fears. The shadow pleases him, doubtless, since he lives under the bridges. Sun and heat do not discommodate him, for the straw of his nest festoons the Eiffel tower. They reproach him and accuse him of having unscrupulously driven the swallows from their nests with his sharp beak. That is true and is deplorable. It is to be regretted that the sparrow is something of a brigand. But, without doubt, that is the fault of a few individuals. It would be unjust to accuse the whole race. Are there not bad and good people everywhere? Even among the kings of the earth? And I continue to love the sparrows for their courage, their humor for unravelling things, their communicative optimism.

Judge whether I can remain uninterested in their fate or remain indifferent to that which threatens them. Now I see sinister events foreshadowed without power to check them nor to notify those most interested.

There against my house misery is organizing. Fatality is on the march. Between two high buildings there is a vacant lot, having, however, an old coach house thereon. From the first floor upward the cracked gables here and there offered commodious lodgings for the sparrows. A whole republic was installed there. From early morning to sunset the air vibrated with their happy cries. The little ones squealed in the holes

and the old ones fought on the roofs. They never stopped bringing from everywhere straws, feathers, hairs to build their nests and food to appease the hunger of their little ones. They lived, prospered and furnished a warm picture of the joy of living.

And to say that all that is to end badly!

My neighbor, the grocer, has torn down the old out-buildings, and put the ground in the charge of a lot of demolishers. A large house is to be built there as high as its two neighbors. The picks work furiously, the wagons are filled rapidly, the horses pull, and the cartmen swear and snap their whips. Soon the cellar will be dug. Then the masons will come. Walls will rise from the ground, grow high and wide. And the sparrows, what will become of them? What will become of the little ones without feathers or wings? The stones and mortar will cover all the holes. Enmured alive, legions of poor little birds will be asphyxiated, or die of hunger, and the old ones, after a few cries of distress, a few anxious turns around the old nests, will disperse to the four corners of the city.

I see these things coming. And, while this nightmare possesses me, the sparrows continue to fly about and sing. Nothing seems to tell them. What do they care for the men tearing down the sheds by the coach house, covered with mud and digging that great hole, the horses urged along, all that passes down there on the surface of the earth? Are they not in the sun, on the roofs, in the serenity of the high regions, with wings to escape with?

This contrast hurts me: this carelessness of press-

ing danger, this overflowing life, and down there the inexorable fatality which is approaching to crush them. All that about the city of the birds made me think of that of men. I think of unexpected events which come to us here below, to those which are maturing here under our very eyes and which we do not see. I think of Cassandra, of believers whom the light of presentiment tortures, without their being able to find believers, at a very distant horizon charged with sombre storms.

But perhaps I see things too darkly ; above all, in the present case. If my grocer is not in too much of a hurry, if the contractor drags his work a little, if bad weather interferes and the building progresses slowly, the wings of my baby birds will have had time to grow. Frightened by the cries of the masons and the strange appearance of the scaffolding, they will hasten to emigrate, and their carelessness will be nearer right than my anxiety. I would gladly be deceived.

THE TERRACE BUILDER'S BREAKFAST.

At the noon hour I like to watch the workmen eat in front of the restaurants. The simplest offer the greatest interest. Particularly touching are those little bits

of barracks where they sell soup for two sous. Well made, this is a feast. Served in always very clean bowls, it is eaten in the open air, on a small bench, or standing if that is full. When I see the worker thus taking his modest repast I make in silence all sorts of good wishes, to the end that that may be to his benefit, and the prayer of Christ rings in my memory, "Give us this day our daily bread."

But infinitely more curious is it to observe the husband's meal brought by his wife, and eaten together on some improvised seat, or some bench by the road. The omnibus drivers, masons, terrace builders and pavers are the ones who make this meal together.

By the manner in which these couples eat their soup together I can perceive more or less of the tenderness or indifference of their union.

From my window, for several days now, exactly at eleven o'clock in the morning, I see a young woman come, very neatly dressed, and with a gentle and pleasant face. She brings her husband his noon-day breakfast, a worker on the terrace. As soon as she arrives, he comes out of the cellar which he is digging with some twenty others. He wipes his forehead and then they sit down beside each other, with one only napkin for both. It is also a tablecloth, and their knees serve for a table. The service consists of two blue bowls and two plates. The young couple have good appetites. But the woman interrupts her dinner to watch her husband eat. One can see that she is happy to see him restore his strength thus, and to know that the repast pleases him. And he from time to time gives her a

glance as though to thank her for the care she has taken of his comfort. In one corner of the little basket is hidden a surprise opened for the dessert only. When they have finished they talk of their affairs. Sometimes this appears to be grave, and at other times gay, for I see them laugh from my balcony. But the hour for work rings, the man takes up his pick again, and the woman takes her way home, but before she goes they embrace.

The sight of this peaceful repast charms me. I could look at them thus without ever growing weary. Others also look at them, the bourgeois who pass by. How many of them are there who have such cordial relations at their dinners? And, besides, the companions seated here and there with a piece of bread and cheese or meat from the *charcuterie*. They, too, would like a warm meal if someone were to offer it. But they have no one to care for their meals. Their wife is dead, ill, or lives too far away. Alas, often, too, she is too lazy, or her children need her attention, or her husband's noon meal does not interest her. How one wishes for a good warm meal for each served by such loving hands! That would cut the labor of the day agreeably and give courage to continue. Solitary bread is bitter. To eat it long, the eater risks going to console himself with blue wine. Do not throw the stone at him. Pity him rather. But, like his fate where shadow holds too much place, it makes them appreciate still more this young couple where there is such love. With all my heart I wish that love will endure, and I would see the example propagated.

HABIT.

WHEN one enters the dormitory of a military caserne in the morning one is fairly strangled by an unbreathable and suffocating atmosphere. But those who sleep in the place do not perceive it. They sleep peacefully, and doubtless would scold the importunate visitor who would open the windows to let in a little pure air. We live like this often, in a morally vitiated atmosphere, without knowing it, ready to cry when a less impure breath touches our heads, "Quick, shut the window, there is a draught." One can accustom oneself to everything, even miasma. Once accustomed, they ask but to remain there. I wish to represent in a topical example the tranquillity of mind which gives birth to long routines and where men are asleep rocked by the *statu quo*.

If there is a dog's trade it is that of sheriff. It seems that it must keep a man continually out of breath. To carry it on daily supposes an inexhaustible stock of impudence, of hardness, a headsman's heart, in fact. So the sheriff is in general a man much feared. They avoid his approach, and his name holds nothing sympathetic. He is represented as a misanthrope without bowels of compassion, happy over the misery that he inflicts. It may be that some certain ones do answer to this sad model. But they are the exception. The others are like the rest of the world: they do their duty as the harvesters make their harvest, as the bee gathers its booty, without thinking more of the evil they do than

does the knife of the guillotine which cuts off heads. This trade is often handed down from father to son. They exercise it with a filial piety. There are even sheriffs who have some heart and furnish proofs of it outside their service. In fact, one is not more surprised or hampered by being sheriff than by being doctor, teacher, soldier or forester.

Do you wish a proof? I know a sheriff who is far from having the appearance of one. Rosy, with a fresh color, light curling hair, he has the appearance of one bringing good news. Willingly we would choose him to transmit messages which should rejoice people's hearts. His physiognomy has I know not what of happiness, announcing that something is about to happen which each one would congratulate him on. It was a head dreamed of to give toasts at christenings of first-borns, and at weddings where the couple married for love, or after a dinner of stock-holders who had just received their big dividends.

Still he is sheriff, without any mistake. He works hard even at his business. I should be telling a falsehood if I said that he had ever regretted certain acts having an evident character of infamy, which he had accomplished in the name of the law, such as to notify unfortunate tenants, widows, orphans and sick people that they must quit the place in twenty-four hours. He followed his trade—everybody must live.

The other evening the sun was near the horizon. It was the hour when chickens go to roost, when sheriffs cease to serve papers, I saw him seated in the imperial of an omnibus. He held a great bundle of papers in

both arms, and with his head leaning backward a little he slept. The petrel sleeps on the storm, and he slept on his exploits.

He had the innocent air of a child asleep.

And yet, in the flanks of that bundle, swollen like the body of a reptile, were significations, constatations, commandments, summonses, seizures, assignments, oppositions, protests, evictions, orders for arrest and other horrors of the same class, the wherewith to cause tears to flow and excite despair. What a cushion, my friend, to sleep on! The man of law cared little for that.

I thought that quietude extraordinary, but I was very innocent.

What this man did there we all do under the powerful and insensible empire of routine. We all sleep peacefully on some heap of injustice. We no longer see them, they are accomplished with so much regularity. Miseries elbow us, ignominies surround us, old lies hem us in and asphyxiate us. Who, then, notices it or worries about it? A few beings considered as fools, with exalted ideas, those who would hinder round dances. Others drink iniquity like water. It would be easier to awaken the dead than to get a hearing from these benumbed consciences.

A thick gangue slowly gathers by long practice, gathers over our intelligences and our hearts. That which has lasted a long time ends by seeming necessary and just, a little sacred even. You are forbidden to touch it. Oh, the terrible force of inertia! the incurable blindness resulting from accepted customs, of current manners, of all that makes a man limp along behind the

others without frowning and believing himself not responsible for his actions! Voices call him, but he does not hear; he is no longer capable of judging.

The ferocity of the malefactors of this profession is nothing in comparison with the unconscious cruelty of the amateurs of the *statu quo*, to the frightful calm of the victims of routine, of all centers and all beliefs. For the malefactor is an exception whom one could overcome. The men of routine are legion; on the contrary they are the majority, the rule, and if these monsters predominate, they earn for themselves the titles of good people.

QUESTIONS OF AGE.

UNDER the obsession of the knowledge of his fragility, man willingly admires that which is lasting. It seems to him that this durability constitutes a proof of quality. Without further verifying this judgment the mass accept it. A fiction in form only, it is in reality a matter of routine and a sheep-like following of animal habits by temperament. That which has lasted long seems to him to be legitimate. Let the innovator beware. The crowd looks at him as the great-eyed cow in the Alpine pasturages looks at the passers, but she does not follow them.

This innovation asks novelties, needs distraction, a capricious instinct, a puerile curiosity. Do not the

children do the same? That does not hinder them from being a little crazy, slaves to their petty habits. To these who thirst for novelty, change the place of their beds, their plates, and they will supplicate you to put them back in the place where they have always seen them.

Get along! These ancient things have always been the trumps in their game. A secret inclination holds us within their lines. So do old nurses keep a tyrannical empire over their nurslings, even after they have become men.

"That is absurd!" you will say, if you are of this corporation of hard-heads. Absurd often, yes; and profoundly sorrowful. To see the world prefer old errors to young truths, old iniquities to the new birth of justice, the old slaveries to the hopeful liberty of to-day, is discouraging. But, at the bottom of so much incoherence, lies a grain of logic. Durability, in the eyes of these men, is the sister of eternity. The longer a thing has lasted, the greater proof it has seemed to give of positive value, and in fact there is some truth in that appreciation. "House founded one hundred years ago" is a recommendation for a social reason. "Principle recognized from the greatest antiquity" is a title of nobility in the domain of ideas. Let us not formalize, having our eyes open only. On this question of antiquity one is exposed to a thousand errors. Let us not be dupes. We are not deceived on the question of antiquity by wardrobes and sideboards alone. Since the taste for ancient knick-knacks has taken root, trickery multiplies with the aim of satisfying it. There

exists a trickery analogous to that in the domain of beliefs and principles. Would you have an example?

The principle of free examination is decried in certain centers as a new principle. Novel, new, young, inexperienced, are they not all of one family? It dates to the Renaissance, this principle of the Reformation. Far more ancient, surer in consequence, wiser, more prudent, is the authoritative principle. In this the authorities are deceived. The principle of free examination antedates theirs. And, besides, it is apostolic. St. Paul recommends it to the Thessalonians in these terms, "Prove all things and keep to that which is good." But authoritative religion existed before St. Paul. Agreed; but so did the principle of examination also. Christ said, "Seek, knock at the door—sound." But admit that Jesus here was but a late comer in history, after centuries of authoritative religion. Forget those prophets so ardent in their appeals to good sense, to the consciences and to the reason of their contemporaries.

The principle of free examination has no less antiquity for itself. In fact it has almost existed before humanity. Do not seek here either subtlety or exaggeration. According to what law do plants grow? Each one of them feels all that ambient surrounding and holds only that which is good. Animals do the same. All organisms live on the same principle, to try, retain or reject.

Human mind has no other law. As soon as it begins to live it judges; as soon as it judges it makes a choice and trial—it proves and retains or rejects. It is by that law that the stomach digests and the lungs breathe.

And you call this principle young because for the last two or three centuries they have begun anew to see it. But even had it not been discovered until 1900, it would still be the elder of its oldest detractors, for it is eternal. Truth, even if we saw her for the first time, is as old as the stars of heaven. But, like them also, she is immortally young.

TO SERVE AT THE RIGHT MOMENT.

BETWEEN the culinary art and the art of speaking or writing there are numerous analogies and full of sense. To the disdainful litterateur trying to contest this, I offer whole a bouquet of locutions to smell, and all well made, to justify my claim.

Do we not speak currently of the cooking of a newspaper, of literary taste, of the salt or pepper by which writers add to their style? A certain book is a delicate dish, another an insipid ragout, a macedoine, a salmagundi, a bouillabaisse. There are tonic readers and indigestible ones. Sometimes the reader devours like a gourmand, sometimes he takes it slowly like a connoisseur. To-day he eats daintily, to-morrow he licks his fingers. If he is sharp he often sees that you have served him a warmed-over dish. You may bring him the next day the same thing served covered with another sauce, the very piece of which he would have none the day before. Then, to change, you regale him with some side dish; then, tired of straining and refining it, you say very raw things.

A cook, even a young one, having just passed the stage where they call him a spoil-sauce, could give writers, orators and educators something to reflect on, all those who have something to say to others.

To help them to attain their goals of words, a certain faculty is indispensable.

First, you must prepare your dish according to the needs of those for whom it is destined. Then you must present it to give it your seal, set it on the table exactly cooked to the point and the hour. How many men fail to recognize this last little detail. They always come in like the mustard after dinner, or too soon, while no one is yet hungry. They offer breakfast at night and supper in the morning, and complain that they have not been successful.

If what we have to say is of a delicate nature let us strain it, and, thanks to the seasoning, let us give it a favorable taste; let us prepare the ground, let us gild the pill. Truth is by no means that stereotyped and rigid thing which never changed shade nor aspect, and keeps the same face and the same impression at all hours. She needs to be appropriated to practical exactions, brought within our reach, brought nearer to our horizon. As you know how, or do not know how, to administrate, she will produce altogether different effects. There are people able to say everything, gaining hearers on the least agreeable subjects. Why? Question of cooking. Ask the recipe.

All this came to my mind the other evening on account of an altogether ordinary fact.

The soup boiled in the kettle. Baby, wrapped in a

napkin whose corners formed for him ears like those of a donkey, agitated his arms and was glad to eat. His little sister quickly offered him an overfull spoon. Scarcely had he touched it when the nursling began to scream and, turning, defended himself with his hands and obstinately refused to eat. Persistence on the part of the little sister, exasperation on that of the brother. "Naughty baby, wicked baby that will not eat his soup." Mamma heard the cries and came upon the scene. "But, my child, that soup is far too hot. Wait until it is cool enough and baby will only too gladly eat it."

A detail you say, a scene from the nursery? That is nothing and has no signification nor value. Useless to speak of it.

One instant, if you please. Have you not ever made observations, just, well-merited, and which produced no effect, to your friends, your children, your servants, and to other persons? I made a mistake, for they invariably exasperate those interested. Hard heads, you think, incorrigible dispositions. That may be the case. There are certain badly balanced individualities, to whom all criticism is an offence and who will take nothing from any one. Still, let me say to you, the fault is not always on the side of those who refuse to listen. It is often on the side of the one who speaks, even if what he says is absolutely reasonable. Then what is the matter? It is because of the temperature. You served it too hot. Carried away by your first impulse, you empty your drink too hot, and you scald your audience. Naturally they are going to vociferate or fly.

Take more precautions, let it stand, let it cool, and you will find that you please.

Others fall into the opposite excess. They serve too cold. What they say has neither savor nor strength, so congealed it is. Thus they talk at a pure loss.

A third complains that he never reaches any solid end, in spite of the evident quality of his knowledge, or the fervor of his propaganda. Watch him well; he spoils all because he peppers right and left.

I assure you in all seriousness, lessons of tact, of judicious proceedings are to be borrowed from cooks. All teachers, all journalists who respect themselves, and all apostles of a cause should initiate themselves into the culinary methods and learn to transpose their domain. Knowledge, talent and zeal are not enough. A crowd of men, very capable and animated by the best intentions, still do not succeed excepting in proving contradictions instead of spreading conviction in minds. What is lacking, then? A little of that spirit of exact measure and exact time which distinguishes the *cordon bleu*, and without which the greatest thinker risks burning his cooking or putting his feet in his dish.

MONSIEUR SON-IN-LAW.

THE widow Martin married the eldest of her four daughters last year. The son-in-law is a real cock-of-the-walk. For years there had not been a man in the

house. The first to enter it therefore found very favorable circumstances, and installed himself there as a privileged person. They were all glad of his presence, and asked but to spoil him. His word carried an almost ridiculous authority.

Now, this gentleman abused it most decidedly. He was a man of strong opinions and a jealous intolerance. A little firmness and opposition would have been salutary for him. The preliminary disposition to find everything that he did or said good, and to bow before all his wills, had made a small tyrant of him.

The family was large, surrounded by a circle of friends of very varied sorts of opinions and circumstances, the which constitutes a good centre, large, ventilated, where one could hear the sound of all the political or religious bells ring. Naturally, the marriage changed nothing of the old relations. They met often, they neighbored, they dined together, on regular days, and every one said what he thought without fear or malice. The free speech was the foundation. They had all the liberties save that of getting angry.

Monsieur son-in-law thought that scandalous. They uttered enormities, they sustained dangerous opinions, they sapped the bases of society, of religion and of the family. These interlocutors, note it well, were all good people, enlightened, correct, respecting the rights and thoughts of others. Some were more to the right, others more to the left, but they were not sectarians neither of authority, nor of independence. They talked more than discussed, and if ever the dialogue grew close, and they reached a dangerous heat, it was with

courtesy, even on the gravest problems. Then they parted friends without bitterness.

Monsieur son-in-law could not take part in such a frame of mind. He suffered from it, it made him ill. The contrast between the family reunions where he was but a guest like the rest, and the daily life where he reigned alone, was a cruel trial for him. When he was alone with the five good people who adored him he was dogmatic, thunderous, he excommunicated. He paid for the silence he had kept before those interlocutors armed with reasons. Returning to the conversations at the dinner of the day before he declared that he found them regrettable. He had preferred to keep silence rather than to provoke a scandal, but really he ought to have protested. Certain things should not be said; doubts exist which it is not permitted any one to express—authorities unquestionable. If the first comer could in the name of science, or conscience, examine, weigh, attack these venerable doctrines on which society and religion lived for centuries past, where would it end?

In short, monsieur son-in-law wished to insist that they should not speak at table of religion, of politics, nor of certain moral or social questions. That would be better than those rash babblings. But, if the desire is clear, the means for realizing it can scarcely be found. They could not muzzle their guests, nor exact, while seated at another's table, that those objectionable questions should be avoided. So Madame Martin and her daughters reached the extreme limit of the concessions possible to make. They were facing the first

great difficulty of the household. A certain discontent reigned in all their hearts, and monsieur son-in-law was annoyed. The other night, in the parlor, he held a family album, and for an hour he gave himself up to a work that seemed to absorb him greatly. His mother-in-law approached and said: "What are you doing, my son?"

"I am classing this album according to my sympathies and antipathies."

"And whose are those photographs that you have taken out and have even thrown down on the floor?"

"They are heads that displease me decidedly. You will do me a great pleasure in hiding them away in some drawer."

"Dear son, you know that all my wish is that you should be happy, but I cannot sacrifice my old friends for the sole reason that there is a difference of opinion between you and them. Put yourself in my place. Besides, I have still three daughters to marry. If each of my three sons-in-law whom I hope to have some day ask me to expurgate my family album nothing would remain of it but the cover. We must know how to bear with and love persons whose convictions are diverse. If families divided simply for motives of difference of opinion, what would become of the country, that greater family? There are ties superior even to the ties of our most holy beliefs, and they are those of gentleness, kindness and benevolent fraternity. What would our beliefs be worth if they are not strong enough to maintain us in the brotherhood, which surpasses in meaning all the doctrines and formulas?"

“Good mother, I have the regret to hold on that subject quite different ideas. Principle before everything. Friendship, relationship, benevolence, all should bend before principle.”

“My dear son, I respect your principles. But I will not follow you in that road. It leads far, too far. I should be afraid that I should come to walk in places where they never meet charity again.”

* * * * *

Decidedly I am for good mother-in-law. This monsieur son-in-law reminds me of those men ceaselessly engaged in expurgating the country, the church, or even that little sect to which they belong. To reduce one's adversary to silence, to lay a finger on the questions and say, “That is closed, fixed, judged; do not touch it,” but of one's own authority to revise, correct or decimate that book of history, what an impious enterprise and as fanatical as absurd. Is there a hero, a saint, a thinker or a martyr who would find grace in the eyes of all parties? At this count there would remain not one page nor one face in the book of gold of the past.

Let us take the world as it is. Accept all its contrasts and its varieties, and let us not attempt to pass the level of our principles on men and things. Let us be firm in our convictions and our beliefs, supporting and respecting those of others, discussing them and allowing others the same privilege. But let us create ties deeper than those of doctrine; fraternize with

those who think as we do. However venerable an idea may be, however numerous the quarterings of nobility there are on that grand seigneur called a "principle," to force ourselves to bow before the commandment which is superior to all, "Little children, love one another."

WELL INFORMED.

THE student Fortenix had just successfully competed for a prize in astronomy. This was an occasion to regale his friends. He invited three of his friends to breakfast at a restaurant. While waiting for the hour he shaved himself in his room on the fifth floor, rue de Fleurus.

A little after eleven o'clock his friend Dumont entered without knocking and clapped him on the back, saying:

"Good morning, Victor; how does it go?"

"Don't push me, you'll make me cut myself. Sit down and read the paper. You are ahead of time."

"Ahead! No, it is noon."

"Are you sure? I am only eleven thirty-five."

"I have just set my watch by the big clock at the Luxembourg."

"A thousand pardons if that is the case. My watch loses time and I will set it right."

About twenty minutes later Mignard comes in daintily, with a rose in his button hole. The two others received him, saying :

"Ah, there you are, you old rascal."

"Yes, as always, on military time."

"How military? It is twenty minutes past twelve, and the rendezvous is for noon."

"It is exactly noon. I have a watch that never trips, and, besides, I have just set it by the clock at the Luxembourg, or rather it was just right by that clock."

"Ah, I've caught you at your tricks! The Luxembourg time is this, twenty minutes after twelve, neither more nor less."

"Don't be vexed, Dumont. We'll ask Gignon when he comes."

But Gignon was late. To kill the time they smoked a lot of cigarettes. On his side Gignon hurries, hurries from his distant hospital by the rue des Ecoles, the rue Racine and the Odeon. He knows that he is late, poor fellow, and does not like to keep the others waiting. Fortunately, in passing the Luxembourg he had the idea to look at the big clock, and, reassured, he slowed his watch, and his steps also, and made the tour of the *pepiniere* to get his breath. Then he mounted to Fortenix, calm, like one who arrives at the exact moment. Scarcely had the door opened when the three others began to apostrophize him, and say "Put him out!"

"Late? Was it not for noon?"

"Yes, but it is a long time since noon."

"As to that, no. I am well informed. I have just set my watch by the clock of Luxembourg."

"How? He, too. This is a comedy. Which of us three is right?"

All cried that "It is me."

Fortenix said gravely:

"Take out your watches. Let's compare them."

They did so. Dumont's marked a quarter to one; Mignard's, twenty minutes after twelve; Gignon's, ten minutes after twelve.

"Very well, when one has an Omega like yours, Gignon, or like yours, Dumont, or a Peugeot in a bronzed aluminum case, people do not meddle with the time. Here is a watch, mine, an authentic chronometer, stamped by the observatory at Geneva."

"Hush, Mignard. You are not patriotic to seek your time in a foreign time-piece. Are these people going to meddle in telling us the time in France? Does that matter to them? Besides, there is a means of coming to our accord. To go to Boul. Mich, we will pass by the Luxembourg, and can see what time it is. These discussions are profitless, and should cease."

And they went out.

When they reached the venerable façade of the Palais du Senat, the four young men stopped, with open mouths at first, and then they were shaken by a Homeric laugh. *It was still twelve o'clock.*

In politics, in religion, in business and justice how many people there are who inform themselves like these young nurslings of the muses! News circulates,

reputations melt, opinions form and are uprooted, ideas are installed which should cause to live or which may cause to die. Go to the bottom of things. There are but stories, hypotheses, categorical affirmations without doubt, but they are gratuitous. They have all or nearly all set their watches by clocks which do not go.

These clocks exercise quite a particular fascination for some. They are immovable and always mark the same hour. A little more, they would make us believe that they marked the hour of eternity.

IMPOSSIBLE SYMPATHY.

It is said, "Weep with those who weep." And that is the best way to console. To talk with them, to reason with them, to attempt to amuse, or preach—all that like a moral help is not worth one sincere tear, and you shall understand why.

Jean Pierre went to America about 1846, leaving his father's plow and his five brothers. Since then he wrote them but rarely and told them that he had succeeded in his business, but nothing more. A last, brief letter was received in 1853, and then no more.

At the death of the father, which happened not long after, the brothers divided his property, the sixth par'

being reserved for the absent brother and confided to a notary.

Twenty years passed without news from him.

Every time a child of that province went to America he was asked to find trace of him. And, as no news was received, or trace found, they finally had recourse to the courts. It was established that Jean Pierre having left his last residence in 1853 had gone to some unknown destination; all trace of him was therefore lost, and no one knew where he was, alive or dead.

During this time his fields and meadows brought him, good year and bad, about a thousand francs, which were deposited with a business man. It grew and rounded out. Jealous ones felt more or less envy. As to the brothers, all married and fathers of families, they said :

“Jean Pierre is dead—that is certain. We have no proofs, but one day or other all his property will come to us and our children. We will let it grow and swell in the meantime. It is like a good cloud which forms and approaches. One day it will fall on our heads in a rain of gold.”

Twenty-five or thirty thousand francs is a great sum for those who earn their bread in the furrows at the sweat of their brows. They must reap, make the bundles, tie them, make stacks, sheafs and sell them, also dozens of eggs or rolls of butter, to at last realize a thousand franc note.

So, as the years ran along, the place that Jean Pierre took in his brother's minds became more and more disquieting. Their daughters were considered as the

heiresses by all the village, and pretendants began to ask for their hands.

During the long winter nights they reckoned the part which would belong to each when the division should be made. Around the tables in the village inn the lawyers, in wooden shoes, spoke oracles on the question.

One morning in November it had snowed in a savage manner. The poor rural letter carrier reached his destination all white and covered with icicles. To the first one he met he said: "I have in my sack a letter from America for Jean Pierre's brothers." In five minutes the whole village knew it. The brothers ran to the home of their eldest; half the village people gathered under the windows. "It is a notification of his death," said some. "Perhaps yes and perhaps no; we cannot tell," said others. The postman had shaken the snow from his garments; his letter delivered, he stood behind the stove, hoping to have a fat tip. Then, before his brothers and their united families, the eldest brother, trembling in the midst of the general emotion, read what follows:

"I ask of you all pardon for having left you so long without news. My intention was to abandon to you all which came to me from my father. But reverses of fortune forbid that I should do this. I have lost all in a great financial crash. Old and broken, I am about to return to Europe with my wife and children.

"JEAN PIERRE."

A deadly silence followed the reading of this letter. Then they looked at each other stupidly, appearing like

people who had received a heavy blow which had stunned them.

At last the women began to weep, and little by little the whole family broke out into lamentations over this brother, who was thus restored to them. The postman slipped out like a bird of sorrow, feeling vaguely responsible for the news he had brought.

Few dead men are wept as sincerely as was this living brother. But there was one thing which I would have been glad to partake of still less, and that was the unholy joy of some of the spectators outside, only yesterday envious of the hopes of the heirs, to-day ravished at their discomfiture.

TO DISTRUST ONESELF.

No, I am not distrustful by nature. The saddest experiences have not converted me to that state of mind, which should only belong to judges, and be shown to robbers and criminals. We should believe in goodness. One is less often deceived in so doing. It is a pure superstition to suppose that the greater part of men are stained in some way, and to pass one's life with a hand on one's pocketbook or revolver, as though the whole society was composed of men of the sack and cord.

But there is a right measure for everything, even to confidence. So I ask nothing better than to believe in the good faith of people and to admit that they are sincere in their words; above all, when they express their religious convictions. But I have noticed throughout my life that the most honest among us pay themselves easily with words. Now, these words are recipients. It remains to know what we put into them. A bon-bon or a vial may hold a salutary beverage or a poison and show nothing of its quality, and the same word may contain very different ideas. It is possible, above all, that it be absolutely empty, and that constantly happens. To talk is not always to stir up one's thoughts. It is to juggle with empty forms. A judicious distrust and one without malice is an excellent companion to listen to discourses or read writings.

It is wise to mistrust those who pronounce big, consequential words with ease, which are susceptible of a widespread meaning, words deserving of being called grave because they are vast and resonant, loaded with substance. Those who pronounce such words with ease do not know their value and lodge nothing in them; otherwise they would perceive their weight.

Have you ever noticed with what simple expressions Christ himself served to announce the news which was to change the face of the world? The apostles left Him far behind them on the employment of grandiose, mysterious and solemn terms. The fathers of the church went farther than the apostles. To-day there is no orator or author, however well-dyed in theology or philosophy, who regularly uses the clear-cut words.

One asks himself how it is that they do not bend beneath the weight of the burden of such great words, for all the human and divine mysteries are contained therein. Distrust yourself! Those who employ these enormous terms, have they really measured their depths and heights, traversed their immensities? It has been said that we must not take the name of God in vain; that yes be yes, and no, no. The counsel is in a general sense. We should not pronounce one word in vain. It is a lack of respect for the holiest thing we have, thought. On how many lips do words not become vain! One would say they have lost their energy. It is very simple; they are empty. An empty vessel will not intoxicate any one.

In the domain of sentiments, the vanity of the language is not less than in that of the idea. They pronounce the most decisive formulas without winking and those engaging the greatest responsibility. Sacrifice, devotion, love, pardon, pity, these words fall from lips and pens with as great abundance and facility as drops of crystal purity fall from a fountain.

But there is nothing that can equal the newspapers in the great play of words used right and left.

This one will announce the most sinister news; that one speaks of his adversaries as though they were a band of brigands; a third in an article unveils all the most terrifying arcanums of European politics, as though he had the key to all the private drawers, the ears of all the sovereigns. After that they take their copy to the printer, and go to breakfast in a state of entire calm. If what they said were serious, if they

believed it themselves, it would take away their appetites and hinder them from sleeping. Distrust oneself!

The other day, in a steep street, there passed near me a truck on which were piled fifty or sixty hogsheads, drawn by one single horse. One of my children observed:

"Papa, that horse must be enormously strong to draw all those hogsheads of wine."

"Those hogsheads are empty, my son," I replied. "If they were all full no four horses could draw them."

How many empty casks are carried thus by people. Distrust them! When you have heard something very sonorous be very prudent; perhaps they have rolled before you, artfully, a majestic tun, long since emptied of its contents, but which sounds the louder for that.

One true word, sincere and full as an egg, moves itself simply and not without effort. One cannot say many such words in one day; one would succumb with the effort. But they are alive, strong, active. The less noise they make, the more work they do. In them is hidden such a power that they strike down, or else console, lift up and draw onward.

I have often prayed to God this prayer, to be able to say every day of my life and under all circumstances, with an absolute confidence and accepting the consequences that they may bring, these six words only: "I believe in God, the Father." With that I shall have provisions of courage, of tranquil hope and of good and cordial fraternity lasting for hundreds and hundreds of centuries. Nothing will ever stop me or make me afraid. I will brave death, I will move mountains.

We hear and speak so many beautiful and sublime words, and they ordinarily have so little effect. Why? Alas! alas! What do we put in the words? All lies in that. Distrust, distrust, and above all distrust oneself!

FIND THE FORMULA.

EVERYBODY knows the automatic distributors. These are of all forms. Here for a penny you may find the secret of your future. There for ten cents you are served with a box of candy, a square of chocolate, a bottle of perfume, or even to see photographs. Facetious mechanics have created an automatic chicken which claps its wings and crows like a rooster, and for two cents lays you eggs of metal filled with nasty peppermint pastilles. These automatic distributors do good business doubtless, since every day sees more of them. One single check is to be stated. We have seen in certain neighborhoods rise above the sidewalks big, hollow columns, very ugly ones, which were intended to distribute hot water automatically to housekeepers. The enterprise never came to anything, I think, for not one of those columns near which I passed was ever finished.

The water not having been a success, they tried to distribute alcoholic beverages by the same proceeding. The drinkers entered a sort of bar where for small sums they could get beer, wine, cider, coffee and all the series of bitters and appetizers without the intervention

of any bar-tender. The service was accomplished by the distributors. As soon as the piece of money was put into the apparatus the order was filled. No tedious waiting; no preference for the clients. A waiter in a café and a girl in a brewery have different ways of serving. They despise some and favor others, and are some times quick and at others of an exasperating slowness. The distributor knows no differences; it shows the same face to all. It is the ideal of impartiality. It is true that at your departure it cannot salute you, nor help you to put your coat on, but did it ever expect a tip, or receive one with a disdainful air from a modest client?

Not all is to be condemned in this system. When perfected it can simplify life. We will have some day incorrigible fustians, actors, professors and orators, all automatic. And that would be a clear gain. So many men would be advantageously replaced by this mechanism, for they are themselves but poor machines which grate and scratch noisily or stop every moment. I have not, then, come to make war on those little machines, whatever the astute avarice and commercial double-dealing of those who exploit them, and for the good money that we put in furnish us with doubtful products. The machine is not responsible for the intentions of the proprietor, and, besides, does not allow itself to accept anything from any one but those who really wish the article within.

What I would wish is to draw from those archi-modern instruments certain analogies in the intellectual and moral domain. The idea came to me the other

day in a telegraph office. I saw the public pass before the little box that held the printed slips destined to receive the telegrams, and bears this suggestive notice: "Draw out the formulas." The more I looked at these four little words, the more I was struck by their symbolic bearing. Draw out the formula. That is a sort of universal device regarding practices already adopted, and characterizing the most widespread state of mind of these days. A crowd of our contemporaries have received no other education than that embodied in those words. The years of their youth have been passed in gathering an abundant provision of formulas. As the druggists put their drugs in pills, the capable intellectual druggists put science, history, politics, social economy, morals or religion into formulas. The value of this automatic method to the young nurslings is judged by their dexterity in drawing out the formula. In examinations which could be compared to mechanical essays, they ask them questions as they would press a button. If the machine works, well, they put the factory-mark on him, and he is admitted to practice. The property of these automatic educations is to form subjects each resembling the other as do the sample machines constructed on the same model. Their intellectual function is so governed that one can easily tell what will come out if the button is pressed. Between an automatic musical automaton and man, who is a reasoning machine, there may be differences, but they are in the favor of the music boxes. I am completely saturated with this system, which at length takes away all our originality, but it has not ceased to please the

greater number, and for the simple reason that there is nothing handier.

Why put ourselves to the trouble of seeking other things when a good collection of formulas will suffice to solve all the questions? It is an altogether too painful business, that of the seeker for truth. To clear new fields, to walk far from well-trodden paths, to set serious and luminous rights wrong, what an enterprise! Life would not be long enough. Would it not be better to carry along the road a sack of formulas?

Thus runs the world. We could not distrust this disquieting laziness of mind which is winning us. For, there is no denying it, life is kept up by the habit above all things, however old, of thinking for oneself. The farther the empire of formula extends, the smaller the horizon grows. There is nothing more bad, dangerous and false than a ready-made answer. We reach it by the system of never producing any more personal thought, and if Descartes had reason to say: "I think; therefore I am," we must conclude that the majority of men do not exist, for they do not think.

It was after these pessimistic reflections that I left the telegraph office, throwing a last look at the symbolic box and its disquieting invitation, "Draw out the formula."

INFAMOUS CAPITAL.

I CONSIDER the coupling of those words as a sort of forced marriage. Since this marriage has taken place

there is a substantive afflicted with a very vexatious qualification. It can no longer show itself in public without its hanger-on. As the shadow follows the body, the orderly the colonel, infamous follows capital.

Capital may show itself never so generous, humane, just, noble; those adjectives are not for it. It is infamous, and infamous it should remain. Let it go out in a carriage or on foot, let it be high or low, be philanthropic, sick nurse, defender of feeble ones or exploit them without shame, it does not alter the matter at all. For capital is infamous by its very essence, as the negro is black. Do what it may, capital will never get rid of its original spot in the eyes of certain people. Would they pardon it if it consented to die by pure devotion? I fear not. They would inscribe on its tomb, "Here lies infamous capital." This is a crying injustice, a monumental absurdity.

Capital is an instrument. It all depends upon the hands that hold it. It is neither dangerous, maleficent, oppressor nor corrupter in itself. It is not unclean or ferocious by nature. Certain millions are as honest as little pennies. Where, then, would be the grandeur of capital which will give the measure of its infamy? It would be like measuring dogs around their chests and saying that the largest were the most vicious. The Newfoundland and the Saint Bernard are large beasts, and very well armed. Yet they harm no one. One jumps into the water to save a life in danger, and the other in the stormy nights goes to seek lost travellers. But the little fellows, on the contrary, which are no larger than a rabbit are often aggressive, savage and

implacable. One would say of these wretched little barkers that they have tiger blood in their veins. Thus people can possess millions with a fraternal heart, and small capitals with an instinct of ferocity.

Let us not listen to the declamations of any one. Watch how the people live; it is a much surer way to judge of their value. It is incontestable that there is a large number of rich who do not merit their situation and abuse it scandalously. In their hands capital is hateful, bears evil fruit, engenders rottenness and serves but to augment the sum of evil in the world.

But do not think that if the power should be given to me that I would hasten to confide their treasures to a syndicate composed of those who envy them. Never in the world! After having turned the matter over and over, I might perhaps leave the things in the condition where they now are, for fear the remedy would be worse than the evil. A droll combination it would be to repair the wrong-doings of one single bad man, to call in several others to it.

If, however, I were here to make a decision, I would not offer the administration of these illy employed means to one of those who claimed it.

And, above all, I should take good care not to confide this important deposit to a few brave people, accustomed to handle the plow, to write good books, to instruct youth and to form public spirit.

I would be too much afraid that they would not understand each other, that their capacities would not reach the heights of their good will, that they would fall into the hands of some clever brewers of business,

to use a mild term. But I would go and seek at his home, in spite of him, one of those rich men who understand their business, knowing how to manœuvre their possessions as a captain his troops, with order, precision and economy, making it a point of honor not to be tricked by any one, and not to spend one cent without need—not doing that from avarice, but the better to serve the general good. Such men exist. I know several of them. They are able to repose from business, to allow themselves all the pleasures, and carve for themselves in this changeable life an exceptional career. They prefer to load the burdens of others on their shoulders, to charge themselves with a quantity of affairs which neither you nor I would wish, take the heavy loads, use their days in cares but too often recompensed by ingratitude. One could not reasonably find any interested motive in doing all this. They do good, not to reach public position, nor even to leave a respectable name to their children. Among them some have lost their children and others never had any. In the eyes of an ordinary man, armed in his thick good sense, or guided by his selfish calculations, they are crazy to take so much trouble. Very well; it is to just such fools that I would confide badly employed capital.

They, also, are infamous. But their infamy inspires me with more confidence than the honesty of their detractors. Such men have no equals, I believe. I honor them above all. The men of middling or inferior condition, the most upright small bourgeois, or the most respectable, in spite of the respect which they deserve can never inspire such a complete sense of security.

Riches are such a trial of one's worth that no one can tell what he might become with them.

And if, feeling myself bound by certain words from the Evangels, I would "sell all I have and give it to the poor," I would still choose these same intermediaries, sure that in their hands the interests of the poor would be better protected than in the hands of the poor themselves.

To irrigate a vast country of plains and prairies, nothing is so good as a high region of springs, of glaciers and snow. Nature has its capital. I do not think that human society can ever surpass it. Do not desire their destruction or their falling into infinitesimal atoms.

Do you believe that the fields of Europe would be so fertile if, instead of the enormous provisions gathered in the Alps and the Pyrenees, each little butte had its cap of ice or each hill its wig of eternal snow?

READY MONEY.

WITHOUT thinking of evil you are going on your way, when some one slips a little ticket into your hand somewhat like a ticket for the railroad. On this square of pasteboard you read: "Ready money," with an address.

Quite near there, in fact, a booth was installed, bank

notes and pieces of gold and silver money of various nations were strewn around in profusion. It was in this booth that the little card said you were to enter if you were embarrassed for money—and had hopes. They would buy your hopes for the reality, your future money for ready money counted down to you. The operation finished, it comes out that you have sold your wheat while green. With the hope of getting out of an actual embarrassment you will have created worse ones for the future. To fill a ditch you would have opened an abyss. But some one will be happy, and that is the proprietor of the booth. Needy, thin, embarrassed, you will have been well squeezed between his hands, having furnished, with other poor wretches like yourself, the means of fattening this honest industrial.

One could read many histories between the lines of this little card. Sombre stories, always returning to certain elements, always alike, monotonous dramas, where the same actors always move about. This ticket is the running noose thrown like a line of safety to one who is about to drown; it is to the fugitive seeking an asylum, a brigand's cavern, in place of a shelter. A man in the water sees the rope and seizes it; a being in distress behind whom enemies are tearing sees an open door and precipitates himself within. Has he had time to reflect whether he will gain by the change?

If you have no hopes to offer in merchandise, the entry of that little office has no danger for you. You will have no temptation to make bad debts, and for good reason.

They receive you politely on your entry, it is true.

You profit by the expenses made on the exploitable clients. You will be met with a smile, like the sparrow which gathers a few grains around the nets set for partridges and wood-pigeons. But how much the face presented to you on your entrance changes on your first words! No portfolio of office, not the least value on paper to show, no life insurance, no deeds, no effects, not even a pawn ticket! And you have the audacity to cross his threshold! Why? To have ready money. Guaranteed by what? By your honest face? A good joke.

The ferret does not lift his mustache in a more disdainful fashion over a porcelain egg than the gentleman of this bureau does his disappointed lip. A catch, then! You have gone there to make him pose like a rabbit. Your affair is soon settled, and the door which closed behind you brusquely says things not waiting for commentary.

Hurry, then, to throw the little card behind you with its fallacious promise of money at once. Very soon without that, you will hear a voice in your ear whisper: "Did you think by hazard of entering a post of succor for the unlucky? What childishness! But do not be discouraged. Ready money—that exists somewhere for you, but elsewhere. Who seeks, finds. You have no papers to offer in exchange; but have you nothing to sell? A little of your honor, of conscience, of virtue, of truth. What if you sold the reputation of your neighbor? One has confided a secret to you; what if you carried it to market? You have a pen; what if you trafficked with it? You are young, beautiful. That is

as valuable as a pawn ticket, a railroad bond, or the expectation of an inheritance. Beat out gold with your beauty, put your youth in a lottery, and the little card would not be wrong in saying to you, 'Ready money.'

"If you have nothing to sell of any kind, seek other things. Be an undoer of things. Do not allow yourself to be without funds on that account. Go to the sources. Explore the road to money drawers; learn the topography of strong-boxes. You need ready money. There is plenty there. Surmount the distance that separates you from it. Take and do not be taken. To earn it by work is to be a dupe. It is too long, too hard, too little remunerative, unworthy of a freeman. Leave it to the blind spirits, slaves of that old foolishness. Duty—leave them the decidedly old-fashioned means of working for their money. Liberate yourself boldly from vulgar prejudices. The term robber is a silly bugbear which clever men invented to frighten timid ones. For yourself, do not be a wet hen. Watch the occasion, learn how to provoke it; and if it delays, and when it shows itself, jump on it. That is the law and the prophets."

Astounded by such suggestions, you ask yourself: Who, then, gave me that accursed ticket? You smell to see if there is not an odor of sulphur in the air.

No, it is only printer's ink, acrid and penetrating. And the poor man who gave it to you, from where did he come? You pass by near him, and examine him with a rather ridiculous distrust, thinking to see a cloven foot, a hairy hand garnished with claws. But no, it is an old man bent, and with an honest face.

Well, in spite of that, be sure of the matter. That formula, ready money, comes from a detestable office. It is empoisoned, corrupting, and bears the mark which you must defy, the mark of the tempter.

A NEW DIVINITY.

"IN those days all the men were bicyclists or photographers and the multitude believed in aperients." Thus some future historian can speak of us when we shall have ceased for a long time to kill worms.

"They believed in aperients." That is just it.

The aperient is altogether a new divinity. She has her temples, her priests, her faithful and receives sacrifices. No other sanctuary is so much in vogue. The office is never interrupted, night or day—the zealots hasten there. Dense masses, always being renewed, reach there chanting the *introibo*!

When people prepare themselves for war, they take strong aperients to give themselves new strength. When they conclude a peace, they take them to seal the treaties. The harvest is great, and they rejoice with aperients. Is bread dear?—they call an aperient in to console themselves. Are you ill?—take an aperient; it will cure you. Are you in good health?—take one

without fail; it will keep you so. The aperient is good in the winter because it is cold, in summer because it is warm. It is suitable to drink at christenings, so that the nurslings may prosper; at funerals, that the dead may sleep in peace.

In ancient times nations occupied in founding colonies, began by first installing their gods; the moderns by implanting their aperients there. To them be the glory and honor!

It is permitted us to find fault with kings, the pope, national glories, even God. But a jealous throng watches over the sacred aperient. They would sooner allow essential liberties to be taken from them, strips of territory, than to give up the aperient.

It is becoming to scold when paying one's dues, and it is a slave's practice to pay one's debts to-day instead of putting them off until to-morrow. But, if the aperient takes your last penny, it is with enthusiasm and without delay that we go and throw it on the zinc altar. One forgets the hour for the train, of the post, of work, but one does not forget the green hour of absinthe. That the wife supplicates, that the child cries, that duty calls, what of it? Cannot duty wait? The wife and child, can they not wait in vain a while?

Understood that the aperient does not wait.

In fact, the aperient is great and it reigns.

To gain such a faith, inspire that confidence, provoke such sacrifices, what has this new divinity done? By what miracles is its empire justified? Aperient comes from the Latin of *aperire*, to open. What does it open? Does it hold in its hand the golden key to happiness?

Does it open the intelligence? Does it sharpen the appetite? Do its worshippers have lighter hearts, richer blood, stronger arms, brighter eyes, or a more solid stomach? Are they able to work longer, be more tenacious in wrestling, better fathers, and better sons, better artisans or soldiers? Do they breathe through their homes the benefits of the god they serve?

The facts consulted answer this: The ones who take aperients, in general have poor blood, their eyes weak, and their members affected by a trembling more or less pronounced. Their thoughts are dark. They are inclined to a bad humor, haunted by melancholy.

In Germany they call those Macabre fantasies, vexing or uncouth, which germ in their brain-cells, Schnapsidee. I find that term very striking.

Certain thoughts, in fact, are comparable with the impure vapors which rise on these mingled alcohols. Natural wine has a toning effect, while clear water clears the brain, but at the bottom of these greenish cups, yellowish or brownish, where the aperients are found, there is a whole world of lugubrious images, a whole philosophy of pessimism. When one has the mind befogged by alcoholic emanations, all energy is destroyed, and gayety dies. One becomes a coward in word and poltroon in combat, incapable of generous effort. Once enervated and lessened, even at the very sources of life, how can they become parents of fine children? They are born old. A germ of precocious decrepitude is in them. And what education can they give them? Between straying fathers and nervous sons, what becomes of the calm good sense necessary to dis-

cipline? There is neither measure, authority nor respect. From that arise continual rubbings, continual exasperations. So the peace of the home is destroyed. Prosperity follows the same road. It is moral and material ruin.

The aperiënt is a divinity of misery. It does not deserve the honors that they give it. All in it is deceptive, even the name. I deceive myself in this. For it does not open the appetite, nor the mind, nor does it open the doors of felicity, but it opens the doors of insane asylums, of prisons and the galleys; it opens the mouth for injuries and foolishness, and it opens early tombs. And, on the contrary, it closes access to many honorable careers, closes hearts against kindness, the intelligence to strong and useful thought, and bars the road to social progress.

With what sort of insanity must one be attacked to keep up the cult of such a goddess!

If there existed in the world a tyrant whose government would result in demeaning, soiling, making poor, ugly and poisoning, as well as brutifying his subjects, a tyrant whom one could not serve without reddening the nose, destroying the stomach, darkening thought, vowing his wife to misery, his children to epilepsy or tuberculosis, by what just and universal indignation would not that monster be swept from the face of the earth?

But the aperiënt remains in full possession of his reign.

The more his misdeeds augment, the more the number of his adepts become.

It is right; all has an end. Thrones crumble, tem-

ples fall in ruins, the gods see their star pale and set. The aperiënt will not escape the common law.

I rejoice in advance, and I drink to its death in a glass of real French wine.

STREET SWEEPERS.

ONE often hears said, "Oh, this Paris!" much as they might say, "Oh, this Sodom!" The exclamation is common to some of our own people and some foreigners. I want to say to them, "Let us distinguish. Of which Paris are you speaking? There are many of them."

Those who think of Paris as a city of perdition, think of the small theatres, the café concerts, of Bullier, whose striking façade of porcelain insults at one and the same time the youth, the nation and art. They think of certain corners of the Boulevard, at all the vile underside of finance and politics, of the houses of evil fame, the gambling dens, and I know not what else. There is certainly enough there to make honest men indignant. This indignation curls close to hypocrisy when those who manifest it are themselves clients of these stigmatized places. Do they not profit by their passage through Paris to go and see at close range what happens there? -

Two foreign D.D.'s, grave professors of the most

austere disciplines, met the other night, face to face, in some "Black Cat."

"What! You here? What are you doing here?"

"I am studying Parisian manners. And you?"

My opinion is that there are already too many people studying those manners, and experts in what is falsely called Parisian manners. I am saturated with their cries: "Oh, this Paris!" If I wished to be malicious I would go and install myself in one of the little corners and take snapshots which would pass for commentaries. But that procedure is repugnant to me. Besides, the sins of others do not efface ours. My neighbor's wrong is mine because I believe in the human solidarity.

I permit myself only to propose another Paris for the study of investigators of the really curious in manners and not in scandals alone. Very well accustomed to nocturnal Paris, they have never thought that there is a matutinal existence in Paris, most admirable and unknown to those idlers who go to sleep at one o'clock and rise at noon.

Among all those workers of Paris at daylight I distinguish the sweepers. The sweeper seems invested with a sort of royalty whose sceptre is the broom, and which brings into still higher relief in my eyes the blade of philosophy inherent in the trade. The sweeper rises in the very earliest morning, in all weathers. At four o'clock he reigns in the city. Sweeping up so many things he has come to have serious features, like those who bend by habit over the problems of life. It is a high lesson to find oneself always facing the re-

mains of that which was the pleasure of the world and its joy.

When the lights are put out and the places empty, the songs and toasts terminated, the sweeper comes.

To him fall the broken glasses, the faded bouquets, all the withered vestiges of festivals and feasts.

When sovereigns travel, or the presidents and their ministers, after the fanfares, and the deputations, the speeches and banquets, among the stripped trophies and the garlands whose flowers are falling, the word belongs to the street sweeper.

The day after elections, he walks on a litter of bulletins, and nothing equals the electoral fever if it is not the calm of this broom which pushes them along confounded in the same dust, the names of the victors or the beaten.

After the carnival, as after the riot, after the headsmen even, make way for the sweeper. According to the days he sweeps up many colored confetti, or washes away blood.

At this trade, whosoever knows how to see and think becomes a sage. He has before his eyes documentary proofs of all that has taken place the night before.

Nothing escapes him, not even the details of the kitchen. At the doorsteps they guess the bill of fare of the inhabitants. What a contrast between that which is swept from the faubourg Saint Antoine and the faubourg Saint Honoré, or on the plains of Monceau! The whole social question lies there.

History is not found in newspapers alone, diplomatic correspondences or on the bronze or marble of monu-

ments. Among the most significant documents are those gleaned in the streets. What does that heavy cart carry, loaded with the detritus of our modern cities? Those who do not see with the mind's eye, will behold only broken bottles, stumps of vegetables, old hats and strips of lace mingled with a lobster's shell. I say to you that the cart carries our archives. It is full of that which accuses or justifies us, of that which threatens us or sustains us.

Some persons predict the future by coffee grounds. A prophetic sweeper will predict it far more truly in turning over one of those famous boxes which bear the names of an ambassador.

I stopped the other day before one of those curious columns covered with posters of some theatre, and I made some pessimistic reflections, suggested by tainted things which I will not transcribe. And, like a vulgar bourgeois, I was on the point of asking myself, "What are we coming to?" when the sweeper came to the sidewalk where I was standing. He put a key into the padlock fixed on the column and opened a door. Then in the interior I saw a complete panoply. Old brooms, new brooms, rakes and broom handles. On a nail hung a nozzle for sprinkling. And, hung side by side, near each other, like inseparable companions, a small lantern and a pair of gutter boots.

At this sight my courage was animated anew. All is right, I thought. On the column is spread that which soils, and inside all that is needful to clean it is found. What an admirable symbol of our Parisian life, full of the most shocking contrasts! Oh, this Paris! It also

holds within itself the means of purification. And I said to myself as I looked at the honest brooms and the heavy boots: "When will come he who will be able to wear those boots, and with a triumphant sweep of his broom push all that impudent filth into the gutter?"

EXTRA HORSES.

IN the times when the great highways had not yet been dethroned by the railroads, when coaches, diligences, relays and those good old inns now lost to us still existed, there were in these roads where accidents were so liable to happen a multitude of extra horses. A board affixed along the walk indicated the exact place where one must hitch them on or unhitch. And all day long and every day there was a defile of horses going towards the stable or their work.

To-day this institution has disappeared from its primitive frame. The highways no longer have extra horses. It is rare that one now finds one in the roughest provinces, like, for instance, that part of Lorraine backed by the Vosges, where the capricious roads give their measure after the extravagant cascades.

"From the height of the jump, the depth of the falls."

The extra horse has taken the road of the great cities, like many peasants. In Paris they are found by the rue

de Clichy, the rue des Martyrs, the boulevard Saint Michel, all the roads that climb the butte of Montmartre, the hill of Sainte Genevieve, and no matter what other Parisian hill. Wherever you see a bridge with a back rounded up like that of a cat, everywhere where there is an improvised incline, an extra horse is in readiness. It is the *deus ex machina* which is to help the overloaded omnibus, or the tramway, too well filled in this hurried century, where they must not stay eternally on one spot, or the travellers get down and push the wheels according to the precedent set by La Fontaine.

The extra horse is never alone, but is followed by a man called pilot, who is neither coachman nor groom, and for whom in his moments of respite he serves as bench, table or bed, unless he has his patient back engaged for a game of cards improvised by the others.

When a heavy and overloaded wagon reaches the given point the driver prepares his whip, and the pilot does the same.

These two whippers cross their fires to stimulate the auxiliary. As to the two regular horses they exploit the extra horse with the aim of sparing themselves a little. The destiny of an extra horse is hard. If he has a double ration of blows, perhaps he has had but half a ration of oats or care. The whole equipage counts on him, but he counts for very little himself. In general he is old, foundered, and badly curried. Through open wounds on his skin the raw flesh can be seen. It is an old creature, of little value. The knacker is waiting for him; the butcher does not want

him. Under rain, wind and snow he goes, stiffening his worn-out legs to gain a little strength in them. Or perhaps he stands in the cold, half-frozen and half-asleep, drooping his head and waiting until a heavy blow awakes him. Melancholy end for a career of labor! If the extra horse thought or could speak in intelligible words what he suffers in his obscurity, what sombre pictures would his brute's soul portray!

* * * * *

Too many men resemble him, of whom he is the symbol: those who are at their forced labor, never at rest and never honored; stop-gaps called everywhere where there is a collar to pull, a cart to get out of the mire; men of heavy labors, which no regular workman will undertake, and for whom they must be like a torn volume or spavined horse or broken vessel. Of these sacrificed beings there are to be found in all countries. One does not notice their presence; they do not exist in a way. It never comes into the mind of any one that they could fear or hope for anything. Having nothing to expect, they have nothing to risk. One can ask everything of them, send them everywhere, expose them to everything. Fear of contagions, injuries, death or dishonor is only for settled people, whose existence has a price and a sweetness, who have the means of self-esteem. The others cannot pay for this luxury.

Therefore let them do what no other will, and go where the most courageous would hesitate. When they

shall be dead of it, we will not have to thank them. Towards certain ones, one is delivered from all consideration, even gratitude. Their function is to pay for others, their reason for being.

* * * * *

My soul is fascinated by these patient ones, on whom all these burdens fall. The more I fix my eyes upon the shadow where they vegetate, the more I distinguish a superhuman light. If they are nothing, what are we? what is life? what the universe?

You make me think of those poor extra horses. That is why, of all the coursers of the city, you interest me the most. How many times you have made me dream! In spite of myself, in seeing you, I think of the invisible eye which sees these mute pains, and the crushings of which no one takes notice. This eye is upon you, it sounds the depths of your martyrdom, and something tells me that even in your shadows He sees a breaking dawn.

MORNING BELLS.

I HAVE a brother to ring for my early Mass, a valiant brother who never misses the hour. He has neither tonsure nor scapular, but two solid arms, with bronzed

muscles, and a large leathern apron. His bell is an anvil; for he is a blacksmith, my brother.

In early dawn, his hammer rings, rings—like a rooster's crowing, like the cry of a swallow. Half-awake, I hear him. The blows are firm and hard. It is not the hammer of a sleeper, working in spite of himself, filled with regret for his bed. It is a hammer that sings at its work and gives you a desire for it. It says: "The pokers were sleeping in the ashes; but the bellows aroused them. The live embers have set fire to the coal. On the black hearth, in the closed chimney, the iron at a white heat glows like a star. Hammer it while it is hot. It is the hour to forge it. The horse awaits his shoes, the farmer his plough, the workman his tools, the soldier his sword. Let us forge, forge the implements of labor—the arms for future battles."

What do you want of me, hammer, brother of clarions and drums? There are appeals in your voice, rallying cries. I hear—you tell me of the holy work, of the great daily labor.

You tell me that there is iron to beat into shape, arms to prepare. Now outcasts sleep, the men of pleasure beat a retreat, and with the shadows will disappear swarms of night walkers. This is the hour to come out for the labors of daylight, the hour to blow up the sparkling cinders which lie waiting to revive on the hearth by the cool breath of the bellows.

The city is stirred in a vague murmur. The mason takes his trowel, the sweeper his broom, the thinker reknits his ideas of yesterday. Each one thinks of his function. Let us think of ours. There are stains to

wash away, injuries to repair, tears to dry, shadows to dissipate, chains to break, wounded to lift up, innocents to defend, injustices to destroy, lies to confound. The old human misery, earlier than the birds, is awake long ere this. Already the slaves hear the whip of the oppressor whistle in the air. The sick are suffering from their ailments, the afflicted with their sorrow. Agonizing problems rise before the men who awaken.

With all that the wicked to-day will not abstain from labor. Deceivers will build their ambushes, the corrupters will distil their poison, men of discord will come to enliven their quarrels, and fanatics launch their anathemas.

Tartuffe will invent a new imposture, Basil will try an unpublished calumny. Men of prey will not lose one mouthful, nor the chatterboxes one word, nor the mongrel dogs one bite.

Shall we leave the field to them? Up, belt and buckle ourselves, put on our aprons. Where are you, then, my faithful hammer?

A voice often says: "Stay in bed. Your pains are useless. The evil is too formidable, the shadow too thick. Your pigmy work will not prevail against that of the giant. Stay in bed, sleep peacefully, and in this wicked world make the least bile possible; it will be neither worse nor better, and you will at least have gained a few quiet hours. That is so much won from the enemy."

But, down there in the forge, the indefatigable hammer falls and rises. "Do not listen," it says, "to that voice which invites you to repose and disdain effort. It

is the voice of the tempter ; the deceptive voice of doubt and indifference, those eternal accomplices of all crimes. Strike the iron ! There is nothing else in the rising sun, the bursting bourgeon, the bounding torrent. Strike the iron, strike the iron ! God loves the valiant. The fiery spark which springs from the anvil lightens the morning of the sunniest days."

Have I not a good brother to thus ring for me in the mornings?

LESSON OF LABOR.

THE Boulevard is very much animated. It is the middle of the day. An extraordinary movement reigns on pavement and sidewalk. In the midst of this go and come, two workmen were occupied in repairing the line of the tramway. They were safeguarded by two wheelbarrows placed one at each extremity of his field of labor. A small red flag warned drivers.

And there, under the horses' feet, they soldered the rails, tightened the bolts, corrected the inequalities of the surface, relaid the worn-out parts of the wooden pavement. At every moment the horn of a car notified them that it was time to get out of the way. They took one step aside to let the car pass, and then resumed their labor immediately.

They must not lose a moment. Between two wagons

which followed each other closely they found time to go and settle a stone or tighten a screw. If they wished to put their hands on a longer piece of work, it was a whole calculation. Otherwise they would obstruct the way and raise tempests among that noisy tribe of free-men.

And, while the rails are free, and work is possible, they are forbidden to look right or left. For them passers do not exist. Wagons circulate, coachmen vociferate, horses run away, gamins and drunken men dispute—they never lift their heads. They appear to be deaf, but they must listen under pain of being crushed; blind, yet with the eyes everywhere. Others, in working, throw their tools here and there, and toss the materials around apparently at hazard. These cannot make one movement that is not the result of the closest attention. If they place their materials carelessly, or let a shovel lie about, or a fragment of wood, just as soon there will be some grave accident, a horse injured, a wagon broken or upset.

Singular conditions under which to work, are they not? Not everybody could maintain them. Certain men need silence and calm to work. Others go still farther in their requirements. Before they will go to work everything around them must be in order. Every one must retire and nobody move in the house. They are a long time at their complicated installation. They arrange their table, put in symmetry all the objects that garnish it, stop the clock whose tick-tack annoys them. After that and several other supplementary precautions, they begin.

I am not ignorant, however, of the importance of the frame where the traveller is placed. So many things have an influence on the mind. It is worth while to surround oneself with precautions when one wishes to achieve a work worth while. Silence—what a benefactor for the thinker, the artist! and how sad is the lot of the worker delivered over to importunate ones, of one's labors upset by idlers on account of everything and nothing! To be at the mercy of the door bell, what a slave!

In the bosom of conflicts being ceaselessly renewed, between the need of gathering oneself together and the brutal irruption of perturbing forces, one surprises oneself, wishing for a quiet cell, a few planks, a roof of brush, one window giving out on some clearing at the end of the woods, where one would see nobody and where one might once in a while see a sportive kid or hear a blackbird. There the hours would pass smoothly, without crack or tear, and one would have for the struggles of the spirit seeking to explain itself the patient aid of vast days, which nothing crosses nor divides.

And, still I admire those pavers who toil in such confusion, always interrupted and always recommencing. Whosoever would fill his function must resemble them. For it is life to be hurried, troubled, disarranged by the enemy and to know how to work in spite of all. Perhaps even the individual needs this perpetual stimulant, and would wear out sooner in a too complete calm than in the ardent shock of beings and things.

You dream an unknown temple. Who tells you that

soon, in place of working, you will not have one of those famous sleeps, of which old convents, and certain modern administrations, know the secret and have for symbol a shaved head lying on a pillow of a folio volume?

One must reach a point where one can gather oneself in a great scene of activity, to establish a solitude in the midst of activity. If you wait for everything to be in its place and in order, to get to work, as the chief of the orchestra waits to give the signal until they hush in the audience for every musician to be at his instrument, you will greatly risk the losing of your life while preparing to live. So many things league against useful labor—enemies from outside, noise, derangements, unforeseen events both public and private. Enemies inside, fears, passions, spiritual carelessness. You would at first that your enemies would keep silence, that your sorrows be appeased, your inquietudes be calmed, the problems of politics, philosophy and religion should be resolved. At that account when will you begin?

Go and learn from the obscure laborers accomplishing their duty in the midst of the least propitious conditions. If it does not please you to owe a lesson to these humble ones of the earth, ask the powerful ones, the statesmen obliged to juggle with the hours, to conquer a little of the time due to public affairs, to snatch it strip by strip from solicitors of every kind and class, to ceaselessly interrupt the gravest labors and the most pressing ones for a banquet, a ceremony, or in fact to ignore that encumbering something pretentious and empty which they call a summons.

THE HAND.

WE admire the bird's wing and with reason ; its construction is amazing. And, besides, it represents so well one of the essential aspirations of our being, to go, to quit the narrow bounds where we vegetate, to spring off into free spaces. But, what is the wing of a bird compared to the hand of a man? As a marvel of mechanism, the hand surpasses that by a whole immensity. We must have admired many ingenious discoveries in the world of machines to measure by comparison the restrained circle of their functions and the royal opulence of these filled by the hand of man. The number of combinations that our hands can execute is immeasurable. The hand is absolutely indispensable to the mind. If we had no hands the mind would be of little utility to us. And the hand gives its measure of usefulness, but under the direction of the mind. When it executes the orders of others it loses a great part of its capacity, and if we could ever make a mechanical hand imitate its perfection we would be able only to produce in that copy, even then so difficult, nothing but automatic movements, stamped with awkward stiffness.

The hand has a physiognomy. Some say that it is an oracle, that its lines, its form and proportions form a part of an occult writing, unfolding the future to those who know how to decipher the secret. The art of reading that writing has attracted many persons, and made them commit many errors and injustices. How

shall we continue to give our confidence to a man in whose hand is written perfidy, robbery or murder?

While keeping a complete reserve before the pretensions of any one's ability to read our character and our future in the hollow of our hand, I must admit that its physiognomy is very speaking. Painters have gained much from that fact. In many pictures hands have put extraordinary action. I am also much struck with all which they represent in life.

Some hands are frightful. One would say they were made to strangle with.

Long, emaciated with the old miser, they seem the incarnation of an insatiable and rapacious soul. Some, when they are laid in yours, seem as though they would avoid yours, have a serpentine movement, inviting you to distrust them. But how the grasp of a loyal hand comforts us! Does it not seem that it gives us a salutary shock of force and courage?

The hand is soft, caressing, consoling. It binds wounds, wipes away tears. It is that also which gives. Jesus has defined the discreet charity in saying: "Let not your left hand know what the right hand doeth."

The hand is violent, aggressive. It strikes, seizes, mistreats. Transformed into a fist it becomes a sledge to kill with. David said: "Do not let me fall into the hands of men." And certainly one can explain this cry, thinking of all the things that hands can do of evil. The vulture's claws and those of a tiger are children's playthings in comparison. No instrument of torture has ever reached their height. Cold, pitiless, they seize their prey, crush it, and immolate it without a tremor.

It tears, wrinkles, bruises, breaks; covers itself with blood and is intoxicated with vengeance.

Look at your hands! See whether they are pure or impure, violent or beneficent, prompt to be lifted for a blow, or to be held out in pardon, whether they prefer to close over gifts given them or to open and give liberally. What usage do you make of those marvelous tools constructed by God? Your principal care, is it to keep them very white and virgin of all traces of labor?

Among all hands, I love and venerate those of the good old women who have toiled much. A long history of active goodness is written on them. They speak of caresses given to little children, of long evenings passed in sewing, of cares bestowed lovingly on the sick. Hands wrinkled by age, hands so thin that the blue veins may be seen, let me honor you with a filial kiss. For you are the loved hands of our mothers, the image of the eternal tenderness, and when, trembling, you lay them on our heads in blessing, something has entered in you of the Hand that holds the worlds.

DISCOURAGEMENT.

It was on a misty day in a morose spring. My steps led me to a distant suburb where Paris becomes province. I was seeking there a man whom I knew to be sad

and almost mentally deranged. These things happen to everybody. No one is sheltered from unhappy hours. Happily, they do not all come upon us at once, and he who is on his feet and feeling very well can help his brother to rise again and continue on his way. Soon I had passed the threshold of a vast garden, humid still with the last shower. Green mosses covered the tree trunks; the ground under my feet ceded with the pressure of them. Everywhere conquering bushes and victorious weeds. Besides, here and there was a trace of a little cultivation: a spade standing upright in the ground awaiting the gardener's hand. I found him occupied in cleaning the old tunnel where wild vines, honeysuckle and clematis fell in avalanches and bent the arches of the sodden wood. Under the tunnel there was a bench near a stone table, both garnished with moss. Perhaps long ago people had laughed and sung in this place, but it must have been long ago, and it seemed as if they would never recommence.

The dull sky, this sombre verdure which no ray of light pierced, chilled the heart.

Observing my presence, the silent worker shook down the mass of dead leaves and dry branches which he was stirring around pell-mell and came to shake my hand.

"Well, how goes everything?"

"Nothing goes at all. It is finished, all finished. I am good for nothing any more. It would be better if I were out of the world."

Sad words those. Sadder than them was the face of the speaker—pale, emaciated, framed in a black

beard making his pale features appear still paler. And the depths of his sunken eyes, eyes filled with shadow, was a lack of lustre like burned-out coal. He began to tell me his life, his labors—the life of a brave man and a valiant one; a noble existence entirely upright, full of kindness and also a simple confidence in God, in spite of rude trials. Then had come days of sorrow, bad ones, disconcerting ones, of bitter experiences of the baseness, cowardice, deceptions of men, financial losses due to bad faith, heart-breaking law suits, and after all that inaction, the impossibility at a somewhat advanced age to find another employ.

Above all, the inaction weighed upon him. He ate his own heart out night and day, delivered over as he was to the same recollections, and he had ended by becoming completely demoralized.

Nothing is more painful than to see a good man with a firm and worthy heart, reduced to this state. My sympathy touched him, my sympathetic words made him smile. It was as if I was trying to wind a watch whose mainspring was broken. And I went down with this torn and overweighted soul in the abysses of desolation where there is no light shining.

At this moment we passed by a great bed of strawberries. The vigorous roots loaded with blossoms seemed to promise an abundant harvest. Mechanically we stopped to look at them, and I complimented him on their fine appearance.

“Just listen,” he answered; “you will scarcely believe it, but these vines I saved from the dung heap. My neighbor, the gardener, threw them on the pile. I asked

him to give them to me and see what they have become."

"That is very interesting to know, and it must give you pleasure. To save something which is lost is always a comforting action. Yet, I cannot but think of you when I see these thrifty plants which you saved from a bunch of refuse. For, in fact, at this moment are you not about to throw yourself away? You could not bear to see a plant thrown away in which you thought there might be the germ of life. You take it, plant in good soil and watch it prosper with a tender heart, and you are ready to go and throw yourself in the place from whence you saved them! Go on, go on! We are worth more than a strawberry plant; never admit that you are good for nothing. Do you know what invisible, good and clement gardener may come and set dry our roots in a fertile soil, animate our withered leaves and ask us to bear fruit once more? Let us rest at His disposal."

He did not answer, but I thought that his large and gentle eyes, fixed on the green plants, took on a new lustre and that he applied the lesson for which he had unwittingly prepared the elements.

LABORS FOR THE FUTURE.

A GRAY fog enveloped the earth. Men and beasts slid through it like shadows. One vaguely saw the nearest roofs, the nearest trees. Beyond that—nothing! Noise comes from this fog. One hears that something

is going on. But that something is uncertain, and the noise is deadened. The cries of men, the hoofs of horses, the wheels of different vehicles, the distant whistling of locomotives, come to me as though through cotton. No clear ray, no vibrating sound comes to save us from those lugubrious impressions. And, insinuating itself clear into our lungs and our blood, this flabby air, loaded with frigid vapors, seems to labor to lessen us. Will it be thus towards the end of the aging world, when the sun, slowly grown cold, will no longer be able to dissipate the darkness, and our anemic descendants will achieve their mournful existence in the bosom of conquering shadows? By what I feel in this end of November I can account for that which will then happen. How much better if, instead of this supreme miasma, the earth, bursting like a bomb, would end its last day in a grand display of fireworks!

I rolled over in my befogged mind these thoughts of certainly inferior quality, when my eyes fell upon the sign of my friend, the manufacturer of hats. What if I went up there? The damp stone stairs to the work-room led me after two stories into a vast place full of light and activity. I expected to find everybody buried among felt and fur hats. Not a bit of it. It was on straw hats that they were working, yachting caps, shepherdess hats, planters' hats, bathing hats, Charlottes, fresh and coquettish headgear made gay with ribbons and flowers.

Still under the impressions of the street, this spectacle shocked me like an anachronism.

"You are rather late in getting off your summer hats. That is what you are doing, is it not?"

"Pardon, sir; we are preparing for next season. Our travellers are to leave in a few days. It is in the midst of December that they go to show the models to the retail dealers for the coming summer. Would you like to see them?"

It seemed to me little in conformity with my present humor to lower my eyes to these futilities. But, one should never discourage any one in his work, and mechanically I set myself to pass in review all these fragile splendors. As I looked my interest awakened. Laughing faces appeared to my vision under these hats. Blue horizons, sunny beaches, flowery paths furnished the frames for the faces. I was soon under the charm, and each one of the graceful bows which took form under the agile fingers of the workers, took the character of a symbol of hope. "Go on," I said to myself in taking leave of these laborious friends, "there are still beautiful days in the future."

In the street, on the imperial of a tramcar I saw a man holding between his knees a young tree with vigorous roots. He came from the flower market doubtless and was going to some place in the suburbs. Here was another who did not philosophize on the end of the world. Across this foggy and mournful hour he, too, saw warm to-morrows. He contemplated in advance the branches of his apple tree, the bunches of blossoms where swarms of bees buzzed happily, and the future in its warm light pierced the fog of the present.

Oh, the comforting lessons! Peace be to all those

who offer us similar ones on our often dark roads. They are forms of confidence in God, all these labors for the future, in spite of the discouraging visage of the passing hour. Do not look on that face too often nor with a too anxious eye. Let us work, sow, plant, believe in the God of to-morrow. Let us deliver our souls to the strengthening suggestions of hope, and not to the demoralizing nightmares of pessimism. We can never hear too much of it. All thought that is too dark and sombre is stained with error. Truth is not dark. I admire those prophets who in the middle of the night predict the daylight, in the midst of death announce life. And you, also, I salute you, humble workers, who call us to order by no matter what sign, what gesture, what labor done for the future, where thrifty hope has set its seal.

ASSOCIATED MISERIES.

IN the sharp winds of autumn, under the fine rain which lashed the dead leaves, I saw on a street of old Caen a leafless shrub which was covered by a ragged umbrella without handle. And, struck by such a curious assembly, I tried to reconstruct in my mind the scene of which this must have been the result.

* * * * *

The morning of the day when this event took place

the sky was radiant. None could have anticipated such a bad ending. The trees over the promenade moved lightly in the breeze, and sent back and forth their accustomed salutes to old acquaintances. Near the veterans accustomed to storms, under the place left empty by the fall of a giant in the last wintry battle, a young willow spread its tender green twigs. It had the glorious air of a mite of a boy, showing in the sunshine the splendors of his first pair of pantaloons.

Poor little thing, they had planted it in a bad place, in the way of all the winds. There exist predestined spots, true cross-roads of storms, where the draughts rage; in their ferocity they engulf the place with torrents of rain or bury it in drifts of snow. When one occupies such a post one is marked for misery.

Now, on the evening of this fine day, the inevitable storm arrived. In a twinkling it had robbed the willow of its fragile crown, sowing far and near its pretty leaves but lately opened. Near there a passer-by struggled against the hard wind, with a span new umbrella guaranteed unbreakable. In less time than it takes us to tell it, the frightful storm had turned it inside out, torn the silk from the ribs and left the man streaming with water, stupefied, holding the handle of an umbrella gripped in his hands, which was nothing now but a souvenir.

In payment for its loss the little tree found itself bonneted with a ragged protector, covering it and seeming to wish to shelter it.

Deep game of hazard! This mutilated trunk shel-

tered beneath a spoil of destiny had I know not what of touching grace which engraved itself in my memory. Two miseries met there, two wrecks joined to complete each other. The same wind that had injured the little tree and lacerated the umbrella had brought them together, giving them at once the value of a deep symbol.

It is thus in this world that there are men whom misery brings together. Happy, they would never have known each other. But in falling their lives are mingled. The ruins of their happiness, leaning together, end by forming, as among the ruins of some edifices, groupings more durable than were the primitive walls.

THE SHOE.

THE Seine had raised waves! In the cold wind of January, floods pressing on floods rolled their proud foam and seemed to intend to mount the piles of the bridges. For me, idle riverman, having seen in the middle of August the same flood so fast asleep that one could not have told whether it flowed towards Auteuil or Charenton, such a movement was a feast to the eyes.

All right, thought I. With us also in the winter,

when there is much water, the old Heraclite might have placed his famous saying, "One never descends the same river twice," and this saying filled me with pleasure.

But I was soon drawn out of that inoffensive reverie by the apparition of an object floating on the waters. It came from above, near the confines of Bercy—a black spot, growing larger every instant. And, when it was close enough to see it well, I found that it was an old shoe; but a shoe in some respects better than many new ones, for it was impervious to water. The proof was that it swam obstinately. It was in the position of a shoe on a man's foot, the heel turned towards Ivry, and the toe towards Saint Cloud, and it advanced on the water with a very sure manner. It mounted and descended according to the movement of the waves. Now it made large steps when in the yellow rolling waters of the Bateaux Parisiens, again jumping onto the innumerable crests of the short chopping waves.

Really this shoe hypnotized me, and having no reason that day to go east or west, I set myself to walk along the quays in the same sense as the shoe. But I had not gone one hundred yards before there came to me such a mass of ideas; and I put to myself many contradictory questions.

Is there anything as suggestive as the old shoes that one finds along the hedges of a country road? They recall the destinies of men on the changing roads of life. Where are they who wore them? Are they asleep beneath the sod? Have they forever taken off their

pilgrim's sandals, or do they use other soles on other roads?

Where may this shoe not have walked? What has become of his mate? For shoes always go in twos, unless indeed they form a pendant to a wooden leg. Has it beaten the pavements of cities, turned furrows behind harrow and plow, or hurtled down the old oaks and made the dead leaves rustle in the distant clearings?

Perhaps, I said, this shoe on the foot of some brave man has faced the enemy's fire or climbed in the assault.

Or maybe it took service on the foot of a deserter, who lost it in his wild race. For, in fact, there are shoes and shoes. Is it proved to me that that shoe belonged to an honest man and not to one of those chevaliers of industry, a burglar, a criminal perhaps, having left its imprint in some place suspected by the judge of instruction?

No matter; it is now on its way to where the shoes of other days have gone, but by a royal road. It pays its passage through Paris, and in passing Notre Dame and the Louvre it salutes them. This retired one of the great whirlpool of life makes me attentive to its fellows—the shoes of the day. On the quays, on the bridges, across the Parisian immensity, on the feet of busy people, I saw them walking in all senses: run to work, or pleasure; jump along the scholar's road; slip behind the wings of chicanery or politics; groan in the hall of the *Pas Perdus*, in the mournful ante-chambers where the solicitors watch for the bureaucrat; stumble

over orange peels; follow behind a sombre hearse to the cemetery, with a measured step.

And I cannot prevent myself from asking this question, "What will remain of all its uneasy travels?" The answer I find in the unmated shoe, philosopher without knowing it, tanned by all the winds. It told me, "The same destiny awaits them. They may fight against it with swiftness and rank; their end is the same. Aristocratic red heels, gold-embroidered satin slippers, buskins or brodekins, luxurious bottines, and iron-shod overshoes, the pope's slippers, and emperor's boots—all go the same road, driven by an invisible and powerful hand."

These reflections made me melancholy. Overwhelmed by the burden of human vanities, and the sterile agitations where we lose our lives, I remained a long time with my elbows on the parapet, following the shoe still floating down the river. It seemed to be full of spirit as though it dreamed of some dainty sabot accustomed to the flowery paths of Normandy, which it would soon rejoin between the green banks where the young colts bound. And, besides, it seemed absolutely indifferent to all that I might think of it.

It was, however, all that I wished to retain of it. In these times of passions and calumnies no one is above suspicion; each one anxiously wonders what "they" think of him, say or write about him. Would it not be a benefit to be able to pass through this life without fretting over the opinion of people, any more than the stoical old shoe of the page which I have consecrated to it?

WISHES.

WHAT good are they? One would really be embarrassed to say. Their vanity makes them seem suspicious to some, and disagreeable to others. I know some persons who are really annoyed and shocked by them. And this sentiment does not surprise me. Too many good reasons justify it.

Nothing can equal the banality of certain superficial and careless wishes. They do not interest him who receives them nor him who proffers them. Many are the awkwardly timed wishes which have the effect of a clumsy foot set upon a tender corn. There are some malicious ones which have the air of mocking you; others so tempestuous that they arouse all your bad humor, excite your chagrin. Add to them the stupid, hypocritical and interested wishes. Is there not more than enough to disgust us?

But, even if they are altogether sincere, intelligent, benevolent, imprinted with an exquisite tact, their lack of power is notorious. From what danger have they preserved our friends? What benefits have they procured? Does any one believe in their influence?

So, then, you are going to propose their suppression?

No, indeed! I should be far from doing that.

And why?

Because, and that reason will suffice, we would try in vain to extirpate them. So long as there are men, they will form wishes. We have not before us in this a simple conventionality alone, but one of the forms of

mind. To desire, hope, wish, all that is human, like tears and laughter. We shall never be able to stifle laughter, nor ever dry up the source of tears. Nor will the flood of wishes ever cease to flow.

But, if I had the means of stopping them, I would not do it. A legion of people abuse the good wish: does that prove that it is evil? If we should be obliged to suppress everything that gives a chance for abuse, nothing would remain. Creation would be entirely destroyed.

The uselessness of good wishes compromises them still more in my eyes. But I can recall treasures rejected, thrown away, because they were considered useless. Everything which has no tangible aim is taxed as useless, which has no value in figures; all which costs and brings nothing. The greater part of all beautiful and noble things may be, by this proceeding, assimilated with evil futilities. Now, if it is wise to simplify existence, to retrench new generations, we must not, however, allow ourselves to sacrifice the grace and charm of life under the pretence that it is useless. What good, for instance, are the flowers? What folly to spend money for that which does not nourish or clothe us! And yet, do we deprive ourselves of them?

In the kitchen a bunch of turnips or asparagus is preferable to a bunch of roses. But should the rose be banished from the city on that account? Has it not its own place to fill as well?

The uselessness of wishes is a little like that of flowers. For nothing in the world would I deprive myself of them.

What good does it do to say "Bon voyage"? or even "Good-night"?

That does not render the days finer, voyages less dangerous, separation less sad, and nights more tranquil. Shall we then renounce saluting each other altogether?

No, the salute is a fraternal act, a witness of benevolence. One can put a world of comforting sentiments into a cordial "Good-morning." And, though many men salute as parrots speak, I shall never cease to find that salutation one of the highest manifestations of human sociability. Now, if I guard the venerable custom of saying "Good-morning," why deprive me of the right to say "Happy New Year"? Even if it is but a rather more impressive "Good-morning," it preserves an incontestable value. But the wish is a sign of hope as well, an affirmation of a better future.

In spite of contrary events and obscurities of life, to continue to mutually wish a good and happy New Year, is to confirm the inalienable right to a hope and a better future. A wish made in good faith and with all one's heart is an act of faith. Humanity needs to believe and to hope. If it still lives it is because it believes in life. A blind confidence sustains it. Is it too much to give to that general confidence an occasion to manifest itself once a year? I do not think so. On account of that reason, in spite of all unpleasant abuses, I am for the old habit of wishing.

Friend reader, whoever you may be, apprentice or veteran of existence, favored by happiness or visited by pains, anxious about the morrow or assured, on the threshold of two years, to see even in two centuries,

whether you make your calculations with pope or emperor, I wish that God will keep your heart in peace.

GOOD WILL.

WHILE the yule-tide log is burning on the hearth, let me speak of a blessing at once precious and rare—good will.

It is at first a sort of happy brightness, disposing us to undertake great tasks. There are persons cold and indifferent whom nothing warms or moves. Their own inertia stops them the moment when you cease to push them. You call them, but they do not come. You prick them, but they do not bleed. Stubborn, obstinate souls, despair of men of action, of all those who have the inward order obliging them to propagate ideas, to serve causes, to recruit defenders of the right, witnesses of truth, adversaries of violence, saviors to the wretched.

The man of good will is the exact contrary—he is ready. Let us say that he is under continual steam, and asks but a sign, asks but to fly to his work.

Others have their hours. They receive appeals at certain moments. A notice is given to duty to come when it is their day. Let it resign itself if necessary to

"make ante-chamber," to allow place to a series of conventionalities, the interests and other solicitors of human attention. But do not claim them outside of the time agreed upon. Monsieur has gone out and Madame is reposing and is "not at home" to any one.

Good will has no hour. Duty calls; "Here am I," he answers. The seasons or the direction of the wind do not affect him. Let the trumpet sound and the tocsin ring, and he is on his feet. In case of need he will have the courage to jump out of his bed at two o'clock in the morning.

For some, to have made efforts once, is a motive to forever after abstain from making others. They have tried to act, it would seem, only to convince themselves that there is really nothing to do, so scrupulous you will find them in retaining the remembrance of that unfruitful action. They say, "Oh, we know that. It is an impossible work; nothing can ever come of it, so to what end?"

The man of good will has for his device, "Recommence." He does not count his failures, he forgets the time lost. In his eyes, the reasons he furnishes to abandon the game can but be bad. The good ones are summed up in this manner, "Return to the charge."

Few obstacles resist men of good will at the end. Thanks to them, the world goes on. They are the coach-horses; the others are the spatters of mud on the coach; while still others are the spokes in the wheels.

* * * * *

Another form of good will is benevolence.

It says in speaking of its neighbor :

“Whoever you are I wish you well in advance, and I wish to think of you. Nothing, not even your worst proceedings, your worst conduct, will make me wish you evil. The more you do, the more I ought to regret it, and wish that it had been differently. To offer you the means of returning to the good, I will resign myself before the evidence only, in thinking evil of you, but give you in my mind the benefit of all doubts.”

Benevolence is a fixed determination. It is not inspired by experience. It precedes it. It is premeditation under its happy, I might almost say sublime form. I find it all the more admirable and more worthy of love, that it is so rarely seen. Benevolence makes itself rare, like those corners of the sky in foggy days. We have become befogged ourselves. Our fellow being seen through the atmosphere of heavy vapor which envelops us, appears dull and suspicious. We attribute to him the blackest designs, horrible intentions. He is capable of everything. He is a liar, impure, thief, murderer. He is a wolf, an ape, a goat and a donkey in addition. Turpitude, cruelty, imbecility are the words which best paint him.

Are you very sure of it?

We do not deny the evil, it is but too evident. But why aggrandize it by our practices and our imaginations? What interest have you to reciprocally attribute all the tarnishings of the heart and mind? I am greatly struck by the tranquillity with which we accustom ourselves to treat as rabble a throng of unknown persons. At the present moment half humanity willingly believes

the other half rotten. Do you find that gay, to be the other half of a decomposed body?

Not I. I demand more proofs to believe in the imposture of a man than to believe in his loyalty. Distrust malevolence. It is a bad counsellor. It makes us inter men who are not dead, and drag honorable citizens to execution. A little benevolence, if you please, and of withholding in your judgments. Let us give humanity credit. Would it not also be giving credit to God, deeply interested in our affairs? Between us, that is the point that reassures me. With such a helper there is no need of failure.

Can you not suppose that people may deceive themselves in good faith? Let us go further, admit even that in good faith some one may speak evil of us. Mingle with the furious wine of our passions, of our sectarian bitternesses, a few drops of good sense and good will. Public life will not be any the worse for it.

That is my dream, while, symbol of a year which throws its last flashes, the yule log falls in cinders on the hearth.

PILGRIMAGE.

I WISHED to see again the cool valleys where I played some forty years ago. Here I am. By the embalmed solitude of the prairies, I follow a little sinuous path,

the same as of old. The brook descends the same incline under the willows. The daisies and the buttercups reflect their images in it, and the furtive trout hides from view. The world in this place made itself graceful and small. The Vosges have become low hills. Between their undulations crowned with pines or beeches, wound the valleys with the narrow horizons. The blackbirds answered back and forth from one tiny point to another. A temperate light enveloped everything. The heart grows peaceful, and the eyes repose themselves. In the peace of this nature untroubled by any cry, where no trace of struggle showed, I felt like a traveller welcomed home by loved ones. And slowly I entered the sanctuary of remembrance. The long years, the changeable life, the stages sad or happy, made far away in uneasy cities, all that drew back, effaced itself, and took something of the character of a dream. I am not very sure that it is myself, he whom they know back there, in the society of men, and who has his name and his work, his place marked on the field of ardent battles. That which appears clear to me, at the present hour, is the past, the laughing childhood. Here is the frame intact. Was it not you, old beech-tree, under which I gathered beech-nuts with blue-eyed comrades, with hair like corn silk, covered with myrtles, which are growing on your knotty roots? What do I see? Why, there are my companions, those, and I know them well, and am surprised at myself not to have been seated ere this among them. Why, then, do they look at me with open mouths, as they look at a stranger? Have they forgotten that to-

gether, the days when we had shoes on, we let ourselves slide down the incline of that rock? The traces of our joyous sliding place are there still.

* * * * *

But, let us follow the valley. It leads to the village. Soon at the turn of the path houses will appear, small, pretty houses of poor people, but picturesque enough to eat. Already I hear the cocks crow. We are then going to meet again, dear little corner of the world, where I lived the serene years which knew no evil, nor death, nor regret for the past, nor anguish for the future. We will see the thresholds of the rustic doors, and, above all, the house, the old dwelling, the presbyter and his big garden, and his terrace where on the beautiful summer nights I hied myself to worship the moon.

* * * * *

But, what is that white smoke that rises from the forest in the direction of the village? Could it be fire? A strident whistle soon settled my mind on the origin of it, and at the same time dragged me from my dream. The echo repeated it ten times as though to say, "Yes, that is true; it is very true." The horrible thing was accomplished, the solitude was deflowered; there was a railroad now.

I hastened, I came out into the principal valley and before my astonished eyes passed, puffing, blowing out its thick black smoke, a freight train.

What an awakening! On the road I accosted an old peasant and asked him where the old presbytery was,

for I seemed lost. With his finger he pointed to the mountain.

"But it used to be in the valley."

"Yes, sir, the old one, but they tore it down. That declivity that you see was the place."

"And the garden?"

"The garden? It is that place filled with rough stones and logs."

"So nothing remains of the old pastor's house?"

"No, all has disappeared."

At this minute arrived a passenger train. It stopped a moment. I heard the whistle of the conductor, then employes cried:

"Fertig, abfahren."

"Finished, en route!" That was just the device that suited the hour. Taking my way back again mechanically, I remained for a long time under the obsession of those brief and hard words, "Fertig, abfahren."

All is not finished, however. For the future to see you, paternal home, I will close my eyes, and I will find your image, faithful and indelible, at the bottom of my child's heart.

IMPRESSIONS OF ALL SAINTS' DAY.

IN these feverish times, when the dead are quickly forgotten, I love this Day of All Saints. It is the day of the conquered, the forgotten, the day of the absent. It

pleases me to see the throngs moving silently, loaded with chrysanthemums and wreaths of immortelles. What is the religious belief of all these pilgrims to the cemeteries? The answer to that question is not possible. Do we know what passes in the bottom of hearts? There are in each of us mysterious places which God alone knows. To bring our judgments there would be the height of temerity and indiscretion.

I do not know whether those who weep there weep hopelessly. They carry their pious homages to pure memories. Do they dare, or not, lift their eyes towards the immortal light? I do not know. But their sorrow is holy, their respect touches and moves me. Whether they know it or not, they lift themselves, the one and the other, above the present moment, and what they do reposes the soul from the noisy train, the coarse and foolish ordinary joys, cuts on the grand mixture of inferior interests with advantage. To weep for the dead is to keep oneself on the threshold of eternal things; it is to belong, if only for an hour, to those whom a brutal utilitarianism has ruled. To honor the dead, the conquered ones of life, to dedicate our flowers to the forgotten ones, is to accomplish an act of spiritual worth.

In each Parisian cemetery there is an anonymous monument. There those who have no tombs to go to, carry their flowers, offer their prayers or their tears. They remember the dead that were lost at sea, that fire has claimed, so that nothing of them remained, not even a handful of ashes to gather in an urn. There they go to think of soldiers, fallen before the enemy, buried in

foreign countries, in the colonies, children dead for their mother country, and whose bodies were never recovered. These anonymous monuments, where strangers elbow each other loaded under the same burden of flowers, these stones under which no one sleeps, remind us of the altar to the Unknown God, of whom St. Paul spoke to the Athenians. Salute them in passing. Give a prayer to these disappeared ones, to those who have died alone, far away, without a good-bye, without sepulture, or last honors. After seeing these impersonal monuments of pious remembrance direct your steps towards the corner of the excommunicated ones. Our law is very strict, but it exists always, and morally it occupies more space than one might think.

In other times in this accursed place, infamous ground which prayer never sanctified, lie the suicides, those executed for crimes, and most criminal of all—the heretics. No corner of the earth, no place of last repose gives so much to reflect upon as that. The contemporaries have always turned their heads away from them. It is cold there and weeds and thistles have invaded it. It has the lugubrious air of haunted places. For the *just* of to-day, the man of correct conduct, of official thought, of beliefs controlled and approved, in this corner is the ante-chamber of hell. Of those who lie there no one must say, “Happy the dead who die in the Lord.”

Sit down, however, in this corner, my brother passer-by, and think a minute. Stir their ashes mentally.

Among these murderers, these infamous ones, the reprimanded of human justice, you will find there the

champions of the future, prophets, martyrs and noble victims of intolerance and fanaticism. If you are the son of Huguenots, you will have no trouble in finding there your coreligionists, the very ancestors of your family perhaps. If you are a philosopher you will find there many colleagues. If you are a Christian, remember that Christ was put on the cross between two thieves. Thus always, even to the tomb, the world has mingled the best and the worst. That should not oblige us to honor only the pure memories, misunderstood by contemporaries. The lesson should bear upon the present.

Human justice is essentially fallible. It makes the real crimes to appear innocent, and taxes the criminal with acts, thoughts and beliefs inspired by justice and truth themselves. Who knows if, among the category of men regarded in the present day with severity, there do not exist beings more just than their judges, better than their epoch, and whose condemnation will not fall back on our heads, in posterity? In the tombs that are well cared for, honored, surrounded by benedictions, and covered with signs of respect, might there not be found thieves, murderers and impious ones? Among those who have been hanged, those guillotined, galley slaves dead in their chains and branded with hot iron, there may be, are, heroes and saints. No one has the right to forget it.

And to preserve the soul from that dust of prejudice which is falling on it, staining it, the thoughtless customs, the current opinions, the unjust and blind routine, it is good to go sometimes, far from the conflicts and

the passions of the day, and meditate and pray among those who sleep. The dumb tomb gives us lessons that the most eloquent mouth could not equal.

PAQUERETTE—EASTER DAISY.

TO MY SON PIERRE.

IN the young verdure of the sunny fields, little daisy, why is it that your smile does me so much good? Scarcely opened at the last dawn, we met for the first time. Why, then, fresh and fragile adornment of the spring fields, have I been able to find in you that familiar air of loved old faces?

You remind me of your flourishing little sisters that bloomed under my childish feet, and that I went to gather with gay companions of my age. Delicate Easter daisies, with snowy crowns, their sight made our eyes shine, they filled our little hands. Of those eyes how many sleep in the tomb, of those busy hands how many are folded away forever over motionless hearts.

Do you remember, little Paquerette, Easter daisy? You do remember; I feel it. The same soul is in you which shone on the brows of your sisters, the same hand, little ephemeral star, lighted you, and in your frail beauty wove an eternal thought.

Oh, the beautiful Easters of those days! A supernatural light enveloped the earth, bathing the forests, and vibrated through the white splendors of the blossoming cherry trees. It was not the light of other days, the passing light of a material sun; it was a mysterious and celestial clearness, pure reflection of the imperishable world.

The birds sang "He is risen, He is risen!" the newly opened buds on the trees whispered between them. A whole chime of tiny bells resounded across the fields of lilies-of-the-valley, and the good news ran and murmured in the crystal of the brooks. Alone, falling under the moss of years, the old cross at the beginning of the path persisted, in all this glory of Eastertide, in keeping the sadness of Good Friday. So then, on its venerable arms we hung garlands that all might be in unison.

Happy times. They are still. You recall them, little Easter daisy? Is it not made like you, that which is always reborn? Thank you for saying it. We will not let pass this beautiful, this royal Easter day, without having opened our hearts to the light, as the field flowers open in the morning. See, here are two thousand years that, in the shadow as we are, millions of hearts have been warmed at this fire. It is enriched in burning, its power has grown with the great good that it does. Easter! Without the things enclosed in that word, how desolate would be the earth!

We were slaves of that sombre queen called death. All life, all thought, all works belonged to her. A black grave was dug beneath the feet of hope. There was no

to-morrow for crushed innocence, no late and repairing day for expiring justice. Nothingness said to me: "I am waiting for you. All paths lead to me. Your tears and your songs, your prayers and your faith, will all finish in the dust." And we went dumbly on under the cloud heavy with fatality.

On this stifling world, one saving hand is laid, hand of man in whom circulated the power of God. It contested for empire with nothingness, with death for its prey; it broke the band of lead that encircled the human soul, and made a crevice in the illimitable horizon. Since then the shadow has diminished in the world. Night has drawn back. It will never regain the lost ground.

Do not allow ourselves to be imposed upon by the foggy hour where we are now passing. It proves one thing: certain fashions of living diminish hope and dry up our faith. There is no Easter for those who sow in the wind, those whose lives are passed in burying themselves under their vanities, the hatreds and stains, in being their own grave-diggers. Perhaps those are not wrong in thinking that they will utterly perish, for they have renounced all that which is immortal. But these mournful ideas grow like morbid flowers on the remains of our corrupted lives. The pure air and healthy ground, the ground of the Gospels, knows them not.

To take part in the message of Easter, we must have borne our cross, have tried to follow the footsteps of Jesus, who sheds the light. Without cross, without sacrifice, without repentance, without the-renouncing of all perishable things, there is no Easter. Easter is the

crown of victory, but it must be conquered. Before crown there is the battle, abnegations, dark places where one doubts the road, abysses to cross where faith only sees clear. Before that pure gold of imperishable life can appear to our eyes, it is necessary to pass through that purifying crucible.

The Prince of Life said to us: "Look at the flowers of the field." Easter daisy, I looked at you, and you spoke to me of Him. You told me: "The things which cause us so much suffering will end; one day the abysses will be filled, wounds healed, tears effaced. There will be Easters at the end of our Calvaries, Easters more beautiful still than those radiant days of childhood where you thought to find in the morning dew traces of the One who had risen."

THE END.

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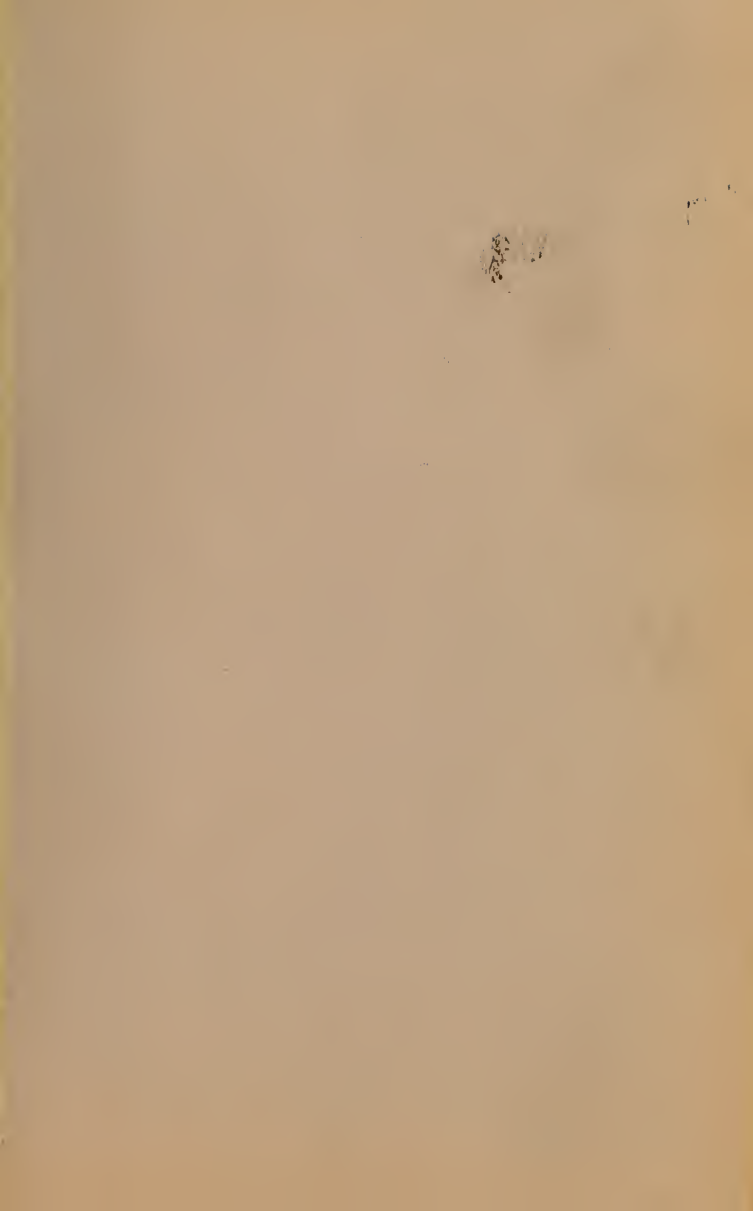
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